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Redeeming London:

Gender, Self and Mobility among Nigerian Pentecostals

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Thesis submitted for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy (DPhil) in Anthropology
University of Sussex

September 2011

Statement

I hereby declare that this thesis is my own original work. It has not been and will not be in whole or in part submitted to this or any other University for a degree. Where information has been derived from other sources, I confirm that this has been indicated in the thesis.

Katrin Dorothee Maier

Date

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Doctor of Philosophy (DPhil) in Anthropology

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Summary

This thesis is an ethnographic investigation into how Pentecostalism impacts on the religious, family and work life of Nigerian migrants in London, and overall how such religious engagement shapes informants' relationship with the United Kingdom. It brings together the study of migration, Pentecostal Christianity and gender relations.

The thesis focuses on the members of the Redeemed Christian Church of God (RCCG). The RCCG is one of the biggest Pentecostal churches in Nigeria, where it has developed into a significant social and political player and has spread worldwide. In London, the RCCG caters for a good portion of the local Nigerian Christian community.

The RCCG is part of a transnational social and moral field that I term 'London-Lagos', which Nigerian migrants inhabit. RCCG members' relationships in church, with significant others and with wider society are embedded in power relations – relations that are mediated and rendered meaningful by a Pentecostal morality. The negotiation of moral authority is therefore central theme in this thesis. I trace how it shapes and is shaped by church doctrines and wider British society. The central modes employed to mould Pentecostal Nigerian selves in London are self-discipline, the dialectic of submission and responsibility, and the disciplining of others. Such dynamics around Pentecostal authority are crucially articulated in gendered terms. Hence, they are investigated in relation to gendering processes in singlehood, marriage and the raising of children.

The requirements of non-Pentecostal contexts such as wider British society and state institutions sometimes contradict this three-fold way of becoming a morally sound Pentecostal. To navigate this tense and morally complex situation RCCG members tend to employ skills ('smartness') they have obtained in Nigeria.

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Chapter One

Introduction

One evening in August 2008 I was in a pub in Peckham with some friends. I had just started my research and was still new to the area. “So what do you do?” asked Sandra, the Shropshire-born Peckham resident I had just been introduced to. I told her I was doing a PhD about Nigerian Christians in Southeast London. “Ah!” she said knowingly, even though she herself had nothing to do with religion at all as she immediately assured me. “You should do some research in the church at the bottom of my road then. It used to be a Church of England Parish, but it is now an African church. Their lights shine into the bedroom of my neighbour and keep her from sleeping, they throw chicken bones into our gardens and they take little children to services that last the whole night. On schooldays! – Surely, that can’t be right!?” She had never been inside the church close to her house, did not know that they were Pentecostal Christians, that Night Vigils were a common practice and that children usually sleep right through most of it.

Sandra’s comment highlights three interlinked, wider social issues in that are central to the argument of this thesis, and which I frequently encountered in reactions from non-Pentecostals/non-Africans during my research. Firstly, in conservative as well as liberal parts of UK society, mechanisms of othering are strongly at work in relation to African spiritual practices. Even when reactions to my topic were less blatantly racist than Sandra’s comment (e.g. “Oh wow, that sounds really fascinating!”), they were always marked by an aura of eye-widening exoticism that immediately placed ‘Nigerian Christians’ far away from ‘us’ in some foreign sphere, where they most likely did things that no one really knew about. Sandra can place the singing and clapping she hears on a Sunday morning as a ‘sound’ Christian practice, but the loud and seemingly aggressive prayers in tongues make her suspicious.

Sandra's questioning of the legitimacy of taking children to church at night shows that Pentecostal practices in relation to childcare have been registered negatively in British public consciousness in the aftermath of the case of Victoria Climbié. She was an eight year old girl of Ivorian origin who died in 2000 from physical abuse when her aunt accused her of being a witch and a Pentecostal pastor 'exorcised' her. Since then, Social Services and school teachers have become increasingly alert² and more media reports such as the one below have intensified the suspicion around Nigerian Pentecostals and churches.

Children were beaten and kept as slaves in pastor's London home

(...) Lucy Adeniji, 44, smuggled two children and a 21-year-old woman into Britain from Nigeria on false passports claiming they were her own. With disturbing echoes of the Victoria Climbié tragedy, the Nigerian migrant and mother of five promised the children's parents she would give them a better life in the UK, but instead delivered vicious beatings if they failed to please her. (...) Adeniji, who has written a series of books on child care, was convicted of assault, child cruelty and facilitating illegal entry into the UK of a child. (...) Detectives from the Met's Operation Paladin Squad which tackles child trafficking say the case highlights growing concern over children brought to Britain for domestic servitude or benefit fraud. Adeniji faces a separate enquiry into thousands of pounds she claimed in benefits for her own children (...).³

Secondly, Sandra's comment in the pub points at continuous public stereotyping towards African migrants - perhaps subconsciously tapping into colonial images of the 'uncivilised savage'. Such negative portrayals are part of a sometimes subtle, sometimes explicit hostility towards migrants in the UK and Europe generally. Sandra's mentioning of the chicken bones in the garden, as well as the light disturbing the neighbour, suggests inconsiderate behaviour of church members, and/or their teenage offspring, towards residents who were there before 'they' came along. Potentially the

² During my research, Social Services have come under severe pressure to tighten their monitoring and interference mechanisms to safeguard children after the death of 'Baby Peter' in summer 2009 in North London. He was not taken into care even though Social Services suspected that he was subjected to severe physical abuse and neglect.

³ Evening Standard, 14-02-2011, page 7. This free paper is distributed in tube stations during rush hours and therefore widely read.

comment also links in with public debates about fast food-related (child-)obesity and potential costs such ‘irresponsible’ eating behaviour causes for the National Health Service and ultimately ‘the taxpayer’. Since the economic crisis started in autumn 2008 immigration is increasingly in the centre of populist political efforts to cut public spending and fight unemployment. Nigerian migrants are particularly in the spotlight of negative media discourse about trafficking and prostitution, fraud, fake marriages, social benefit ‘scrounging’ and child abuse.

Thirdly, the alleged throwing away of chicken bones also points at much-debated issues around antisocial behaviour of teenagers and (ir)responsible parenting, among working class and/or black UK residents. Reports of the increase of crime on the streets, the breakdown of ‘discipline’ in schools, and, not least, the riots at the beginning of August 2011, are perceived as a crisis of morality in UK society. After the riots, Prime Minister Cameron’s answer to morally ‘sick’ ‘pockets of society’ is on the one hand an emphasis on law-enforcement policing and on the other a cry for ‘unbroken’ families to transmit certain moral values.⁴

This moral crisis in the UK is to be resolved through the production of particular citizens, accompanied by increase in monitoring of suspicious ‘other’ forms of morality. Among local and law-enforcing authorities, the ‘problem’ with black majority churches is considered big enough to have Faith Liaison Officers who seek dialogue and in effect help to enforce regulations concerning the churches’ transparency, use of public space, fire safety and licensing issues, as well as child protection issues.⁵ It is within such a climate of a society-wide state of moral emergency and the legitimacy of engaging in surveillance of African migrants and Charismatic Christians that Sandra assumes my research would be geared towards monitoring African churches and their members’ behaviour.

An estimated 98,000 UK residents were born in Nigeria, which makes them the second largest immigrant group from Africa and the tenth largest out of all immigrant

⁴ Cameron emphasised that the riots were as much a sign of a moral as of a political problem. Speech on 10-08-2011; <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JlOxbI9st60> [accessed 02-09-2011].

⁵ Interviews with Katie Miller, Metropolitan Police, 07-10-2008 and Alison Licorish, Lewisham Council, 05-09-2008.

nationalities (Matheson 2010: 17). Most of them live in London (Doubleday 2008: 7). Within London, Nigeria is the most common non-UK country of origin in the Boroughs of the Southeast along the River Thames (Southwark, Lewisham, Greenwich, Bexley; ONS 2009: 8).⁶ Many are of Yoruba descent and/or grew up in Lagos and are familiar with Yoruba language and customs. In London, there are approximately 47 600 Yoruba speakers (Vertovec 2006: 11, in reference to Storkey 2000). The Multilingual Capital Survey showed that in the year surveyed, Yoruba was the ninth most common language among the 850,000 school children involved (Baker and Mohielden 2000).⁷

In media discourses and informal statements, such as Sandra's, the cultural and social otherness of African migrants appears as partly causing the perceived moral crisis. However, Nigerian-born members of Pentecostal churches such as the RCCG, who are at the centre of this thesis, see themselves as a solution. Nigerian Pentecostals' analysis of current British society is surprisingly similar to Cameron's narrative of broken family structures and the lack of responsibility as the cause of a sick society. Though on a different basis, Pentecostal practice also includes a heightened degree of (self)monitoring. However, Pentecostals' reference points are a morality and behavioural standards that are based on the Bible. The type of citizen which a Pentecostal regime of power seeks to produce differs significantly from the one that politicians like Cameron envisage. Therefore, an African migrant perspective in which religion is an important identity marker, as well as a crucial form of organisation, challenges liberal, nation state based, and supposedly secular European societies.

"Black African migrants are a growing and increasingly visible diaspora", which "constructs its own moral discourses and claims to citizenship on moral grounds" (Fumanti and Werbner 2010: 4). But what happens when immigrants claim a voice on their own moral basis? What if such criteria are seen (by state or media) as fundamentally 'different' from liberal 'values' and potentially intolerable? How do immigrants nevertheless retain agency in this struggle for recognition and economic self-improvement?

⁶ Other areas of concentration are Lambeth in the Southwest and Newham and Hackney in the Northeast, (Doubleday 2008: 7, in reference to Kyambi 2005).

⁷ Unfortunately, at the time I finished writing the thesis, the relevant results of the 2011 census were not yet available.

The mosaic-like glimpses above indicate the intertwinement of religion and morality, gender and family and the relationship between Nigerian migrants and the British state. Since these factors have rarely been thought about together in a systematic way, this thesis offers a deeper analysis of their interrelationship. I am using the Redeemed Christian Church of God as one of the most visible and – among Nigerian migrants – socially most important churches as the basis of my case study. However, I also examine the relevance of Pentecostal practice beyond the church institution, looking at the members' marital, family and work lives.

The thesis brings together the study of migration, Pentecostal Christianity and gender relations, but not only to complement each other in an 'add-on' fashion. I will demonstrate that they also cross-fertilise and push the boundaries of the internal debates in each individual theoretical field. Looking at Pentecostalism within a migration context forces us to take the interaction of religious doctrines with everyday life into account. It prompts us to leave the confinements of the church to examine more accurately where the boundaries of a Pentecostal sphere are actually drawn, in religious homes, bodily appearances and in a city space that is in the process of being missionised. Looking at gendered power sheds new light on the workings of complex Pentecostal hierarchies and modes of agency *through* submission. And a religious lens allows us to see how migrants make sense of their environment and how they negotiate a morally complex migration situation, using what I will call *smartness*.

Theoretical Framework

Practising Pentecostalism

Pentecostalism has seen a significant resurgence over the past two decades or so. This development leads Martin to place it in the context of other religious mass mobilisations such as Islam, Hinduism and Buddhism (2002: 1). It needs to be considered for its

potential to transgress liberal assumptions about boundaries between the secular and the religious. It has grown particularly in the Southern hemisphere, but also in Europe and North America - partly as a result of transnational migration from Africa. The increase of migrant churches as well as their social impact on wider society (Burgess et al. 2010) have led to the production of a considerable body of literature. Studies of migrant Christianity frequently discuss questions relating to the globality/locality of religious networks and communications, but power dimensions in religious performance and practice are often neglected in these works. Rather than looking closely at the constitution of selves, such studies build on a sometimes essentialist notion of 'migrant identity'.

Much of this work looks at the role that African churches and institutionalised practices play in the identity formation of migrants in Europe. Such church-based studies (e.g. Harris 2006, Hunt and Lightley 2001, Jach 2005, Toulis 1997) often see the church context as an ethnically encapsulated "migrant space" (Brettell 2008: 134) where migrants are empowered to take control of balancing the degree of contact with an often hostile and racist host society with creating continuity (Adogame and Weissköppel 2005: 6).

Doubleday's study (2008) demonstrates the crucial intertwining of Yoruba Londoners' subjectivities and life strategies with Christian ideas. Whereas he looks at religion through an ethnicised lens, my work places its focus on Pentecostalism as the point of departure. Hence, most of my own fieldwork took place within parishes of one particular church, the RCCG. Hunt (2002) examines the construction of a shared individual and collective migrant identity in the RCCG. Implicit in his approach is a discontinuity that migrants supposedly experience as something negative when they move from 'there' (Nigeria) to 'here' (UK). Such a functionalist "home away from home" (Adogame 1998), approach relies heavily on the assumption that migration is a rupture that inevitably causes a feeling of lack, helplessness or insecurity that needs to be compensated. It does not sufficiently acknowledge religion as a phenomenon with wider social and political relevance and tends to conceal the particular circumstances

and power relations that produce migrants' insecurities.⁸ Furthermore, a notion of 'rupture' resonates with Christian discourses about 'rapture' and risks reproducing doctrines of salvation, healing and divine empowerment rather than questioning them and establishing links with wider contexts.

I do not deny that there are dynamics of differentiation towards the 'outside' in the RCCG and among its members – in fact some of my study will examine precisely such modes of encapsulation; but church boundaries are also transgressed and expanded in various ways. To avoid a circular argument about migratory rupture and church encapsulation, my research has centred on church members as individuals, their lives beyond the church as institution, and is geared towards an emphasis on religious practice and experience in the widest sense I was able to observe. Such an approach allows me to examine a range of ambivalences and complexities in how people live as Christian men or women in a space that includes the church space and the 'outside', 'here' and 'there', and that goes beyond Christian belief as a mere reaction to a lack of stability.

What religion 'is' has long been debated in anthropology. Vasquez (2008: 154) reminds us that the very concept of 'religion' is an invention of religious scholars, reinforced and legitimated by their studies. Schielke suggests the virtue of taking a "fuzzy and open-ended view" and looking at religion "as a grand scheme that is actively imagined and debated by people and that can offer various kinds of direction, meaning and guidance in people's lives." (2010: 14). In this sense, religion produces particular selves who feel touched by a meta-empirical sphere (Meyer 2006: 6-7). In reverse, religion is also (re-) produced by specific selves in practices and interactions towards oneself and social others, which create positionalities within a religious network in a process of negotiation (Vasquez 2008: 156).

Pentecostalism, a form of Protestant Christianity, is one such "grand scheme". Religious studies scholars and theologians emphasise that Pentecostalism is far from

⁸ The literature on Caribbean forms of migrant churches differs somewhat from the analysis of African migrant Pentecostalism. Kalilombe (1997) embeds Caribbean-dominated churches strongly in the context of racism in British society and mainline churches. However, his argument about black majority churches as spaces of resistance shares the functionalism of the 'home-away from home' perspective.

homogeneous and often distinguish them according to historical phases or doctrinal differences (see e.g. Gaiya 2002). But all “African Pentecostalism(s)” seem to be characterised by faith healing, prophecy, exorcism, speaking in tongues, spontaneous prayer, exuberant liturgical expression and a stress on dreams and visions (Ukah 2007: 9).

In the anthropology of Pentecostalism, three main theoretical strands can be identified in recent research. The phenomenon has (firstly) been debated in the context of current globalisation (Austin-Broos 1997, Coleman 2000, Marshall 1998, Robbins 2004a), sometimes specifically in spatial terms (Ukah 2005a, Knibbe 2009). Many studies recognise a dialectic (Meyer 2004b: 463) between globalising, homogenising and localising, differentiating elements in Pentecostalism. This produces a Pentecostal “culture” (Robbins 2004a) that allows a spread worldwide alongside adaptation to specific local conditions. For example, Austin-Broos’s study examines “(...) how Pentecostalism became Jamaican” (1997: 5).

Pentecostal aims to “make a complete break with the past” (Meyer 1998) that embody notions of conversion as ‘re-birth’ in Christ have (secondly) inspired reflections on its relationship with postcolonial history, economy and politics – especially in the Africanist context (Gifford 1990, Marshall 2009, Maxwell 1998, Meyer 1998, Smith 2007: 209ff). For example, Pentecostalism simultaneously creates and overcomes occult economies (Marshall 2009: 199),⁹ producing continuity as well as a ‘break’ with religious forms that are constructed as ‘traditional’. Linked to such discussions about West African forms of ‘modernity’ are studies of Pentecostal expressive forms, specifically the use of new media (Ukah 2003 and 2005b, Hackett 1998, Meyer 2004a and 2006, Witte 2008).

At the heart of Pentecostal practice lies the question of access to divine power, health and wealth (as well as the accusations of its abuse by pastors). This emphasis has (thirdly) given rise to studies about Pentecostal authority, empowerment and agency, as well as the formation of Pentecostal selves (Csordas 1994 and 1997, van Dijk 2001).

⁹ The term *occult economies* was coined by Comaroff and Comaroff (1999).

All three anthropological strands of literature on Pentecostalism are influenced by an emphasis on experience and practice. Inspired by such approaches, my study pays particular attention to what religious people do and how it is done in the specific context of Nigerian migration to the UK. This strategy leads to the examination of religious authority and gendered power relations beyond the institutional level and in more detail than most other studies about migrant Christianity. It also prompts an alternative understanding of migration as ‘mobility’, and ‘migrant space’ as a ‘transnational religious field’.

Nigerian Pentecostalism in London is a *lived religion*. It is more than a structure with particular rituals and a set of doctrines. Religion and religious practice are not just what people do in church. It commonly goes further than that and has impacts on seemingly non-religious areas of life. The RCCG becomes one environment, among others, where the relationship between the individual and the social is negotiated and practised, in a social and spiritual network with flexible boundaries. The concept of lived religion “supplant[s] old hierarchies in the study of religion that have long distinguished matters of belief, theology, and intellectual life from behaviours, habits, and material practices such as ritual activity” (Griffith and Savage 2006: xvii). Schielke suggests the presence of overlaps and similarities between religion and the way people live *other* ‘grand schemes’ such as ‘capitalism’ and ‘love’.

In all these cases, we are talking about great hopes, deep anxieties and compelling promises about grand schemes and powerful persons that will lead to practical solutions, promises that people try to follow and to put in practice. (...) Some attempts actually help people to live a better life as they understand it. Others result in tragedy. Most are ambivalent, providing both satisfaction and suffering (Schielke 2010: 14).

Similar to Schielke’s observations in Egypt, Pentecostal practices in the RCCG in London do not just talk about faith issues. They also talk about gender, power relations

and migration.¹⁰ On the basis of an experiential understanding that goes beyond a strategic, functional deployment of religion, but in which religion and other grand schemes mutually shape each other, Pentecostalism can be seen as an analytical *lens* through which we can gain new insights into wider aspects of believers' lives. Here, I do not refer to an add-on model of Pentecostalism as something that tints one's life, but could just as well be removed like a pair of glasses. Practising Pentecostalism is inextricably intertwined with other areas of one's being.

To become Pentecostal, one has to rhetorically and ritually surrender one's life to Jesus. In Pentecostalism worldwide, the notion of conversion as 'being born again' marks the 'death' of the old self. As a consequence, there are expected to be changes in the believer's values, their perception of the world (including the invisible spiritual realm) as well as in their everyday behaviour. Despite the connotation of initial re-birth as a sudden U-turn, forming a Pentecostal subjectivity is a long, painstaking process with ups and downs. Believers train their capacity for self-monitoring and self-discipline, develop a particular mode of interacting with others and judgement of situations, and transform bodily patterns. Through "work of the self on the self" (Marshall 2009: 129), converts learn how to experience the truth of revelation and the power of the Holy Spirit through "intellectual apprehension of moral doctrines" in combination with "gradual acquisition and enactment of a series of bodily techniques (fasting, speaking in tongues), narrative forms (testimony, prayer, song), and aesthetics (dress, comportment)" (ibid: 132).¹¹ Pentecostal selves live their faith not just in church, but also when they sing and pray while doing housework or travelling on the bus, in interactions with work colleagues, reading situations and incidences in spiritual terms as miracles or signs of the Holy Spirit.

Marleen de Witte points to a tension that she describes as the central paradox of religion: "Religion is about the presence of power(s) beyond the sensual. And yet for making this power experienceable, even imaginable, religion depends on sensory mediation" (Witte 2008: 6). Religion does not exist outside of *living* it, outside of

¹⁰ As an example we can think of practices of dressing that are discussed as biblical issues, but also implicitly involve the negotiation of gendered power relations and migration conditions. This is discussed in more detail in the chapters below.

¹¹ I elaborate further on this process of transformation in Chapter Two.

religious *practice*.¹² In her study, de Witte examines the different types of material media (electronic devices and people) through which religions come into existence in Ghana. I concentrate on what religion *does* to sacralise practices and experiences in all areas of life.¹³

Many Pentecostal practices focus on or involve the use of the body. They have impacts on the way believers perceive, dress, heal, control and move their bodies, and produce a specific (bodily) way of belonging and experiencing.¹⁴ The body plays a very ambiguous role in born-again subjectivity: “Charismatics (...) authenticate the born-again Christian’s body as the prime locus of Holy Spirit power, but they expose a strong distrust of the bodily senses” (Witte 2008: 22). Perhaps as a result of this ambivalence, the body dominates many negotiations of moral authority and self-hood of the Nigerian Pentecostals I worked with (as we will see in the later chapters). This emphasis on the conduct of the body within West African-derived Pentecostal practice demands analytical attention (Witte 2008: 22). Gender-sensitive literature in particular acknowledges that religious experience is grounded in bodily movement. Thus, Harding shows how the conditions of slavery are specifically remembered in bodily practices around dressing, food and the ‘work’ of worship among women of the African diaspora in Brazil. It is these embodied forms of knowledge that allow the women “[a] way of experiencing a relationship to history, to divinity, to ancestry from within the movements of one’s own body, from within the deepest memories of one’s own cells” (Harding 2006: 17). Religious bodily sensations and hence religious subjectivities are produced by what Birgit Meyer calls *sensory regimes* that “modulate people of flesh and blood, seeking to inscribe religion into their bones” (Meyer 2006: 24).

Furthermore, a theoretical focus on the embodied (Pentecostal) self allows for a concept of religious experience that does not need to decide the degree to which this is socially determined and a notion of agency that does not need to qualify whether it occurs on

¹² *Practice* also seems to be an appropriate tool in relation to Nigerian Pentecostalism to grasp the strong sense that there is only a very porous, if any, boundary between doctrine and daily actions, between words and deeds and between the material and the spiritual realm. Listening and uttering words are thought to have a tangible, material effect. Pentecostals convert to a *regime of practices* (Marshall 2009: 45). See Ortner (1984) for an overview of the more general debates around theories of practice.

¹³ Both the use of media and the *mediating* quality of religion are negotiable and thus embedded in power relations (Witte 2008: 21).

¹⁴ This is also true for other religions; see e.g. Mahmood 2001 and 2005.

individual initiative or is socially dictated. Notions of *embodiment* as the “existential condition in which the body is the subjective source or intersubjective ground of experience” (Csordas 1999: 181) have provided anthropology with an opportunity to rethink aspects of culture and the self. Different from Bourdieu’s *habitus* (e.g. 1977, 1990), embodiment (Csordas 1990) puts less emphasis on the unconscious and opens up more space to think about how habitus is acquired (see Mahmood 2001). Because the body is both a source for representation and a ground for ‘being in the world’, the concept of embodiment allows for an account of ‘being’ alongside ‘representation’ (Csordas 1999: 183-184). Religious bodily practices and sensations are not necessarily acquired through unconscious processes. In Pentecostal practices such as prayer and worship, they are often explicitly trained. Sensory regimes produce a collective *common sense* as well as training one’s own religious sensations, in church practices as well as in other areas of individual lives.

Pentecostalism is reproduced by people who apply doctrinal norms through practice to fulfil them in a discursive and bodily way. In this sense, precisely what people do to be Pentecostal is not important per se; what is crucially relevant is that what they do is recognised as a Pentecostal norm. The involvement of norms indicates that becoming Pentecostal – to be *Pentecostalised*¹⁵ - is embedded in power relations. “[C]onversion as a process involves a mode of subjectivation, in which the individual is both subjected to this regime and becomes an active subject of the new practices and modes of interpreting the world they involve” (Marshall 2009: 129). I show in the course of the thesis, that the power relations that determine which practices are seen as appropriate are flexible, but can be unequal.

Gendered Power Relations and Agency

To shed light on the ways Pentecostal Nigerians negotiate their moral grounds in the British environment, we need to focus on how they navigate dynamics of power and authority within the church and with the ‘outside’ society. “Bringing gender in[to]”

¹⁵ After Catherine Bell’s notion of *ritualisation* (1992); ritualised behaviour differs from a habit only by being marked as ‘special’; see also Hollywood (2006).

(Pessar and Mahler 2003) the analysis of religion and migration is useful and necessary because gender is a crucial factor in Pentecostal “cultural formations” worldwide (Robbins 2004a: 131-137, see also Austin-Broos 1997, Frederick 2003). Pentecostal discourses and practices centre extensively around femininity and masculinity, sexuality, reproduction and family life. Issues of social relations, agency and authority are implicitly or explicitly gendered. In spite of this, attempts to include gender systematically in the analysis of Pentecostalism have been fairly modest so far. This is especially true for Nigerian and Nigerian-diaspora Pentecostalism. While taking racialised contexts into account, the relevance of gender is neglected (Adogame and Weissköppel 2005, Doubleday 2008, Hunt 2002, Hunt and Lightley 2001).

There are three Pentecostalism-related gender dimensions that I would like to bring out here. As in most Pentecostal churches, the RCCG builds firstly on a gendered formal structure, a hierarchy where men populate the top and women the bottom ranks. This aspect has to some extent been documented in the literature. Studies such as Ukah’s (2008) and Bateye’s (2007) focus on the presence/absence of women in formal church hierarchies. Implicitly such studies reproduce Pentecostal gender discourses that locate the ‘normal’ female domain in a ‘domestic’ space. A focus on (abnormal) female leaders conceals the involvement of ‘ordinary’ Pentecostal women in informal ways; it constructs such women as passive and potentially collectively oppressed. It homogenises ‘men’ and ‘women’ as groups instead of highlighting the internal contestations of certain gendered practices. Furthermore, it obscures the complexity of gendered power relations beyond formal structures and doctrines. Some studies counterbalance these tendencies by portraying the lived realities of female Pentecostals (Frederick 2003, Toulis 1997). However, they neglect women’s relations with men as well as male perspectives.¹⁶

Instead, I perceive gender as a relational category.¹⁷ In this quality, gender is intimately intertwined with dynamics of power. To theorise this aspect, I draw on feminist literature. Some concepts that this body of literature offers allow me to highlight

¹⁶ Rijk van Dijk’s work is one of the few that includes questions of family dynamics in migration (Dijk 2002a and 2004).

¹⁷ For an early development of this concept, in the form of the *social relations approach*, see Whitehead (1979).

significant parallels and intertwining with the (re-)production of religious authority. I perceive gendered behaviour as well as the gendered body as a social construction. Like other regimes of power, socially constituted gender regimes are powerful because they naturalise themselves and produce bodily and other material realities.¹⁸

Apart from the structural context that is gendered, Pentecostal power becomes, secondly, manifest in the way in which gender relations are lived in church as well as in seemingly unrelated areas of everyday life.¹⁹ Certain trajectories and behaviour – ‘roles’ – for men and women are biblically justified as the norm that pleases God. Some gendered practices are highly contested as I will show in detail in later chapters; however this situation highlights all the more the fact that other aspects are not questioned at all. Gender is perceived as dual, mutually exclusive, absolute: there are only two genders, one is either man or woman (for one’s whole life), and people are male or female at all times. Furthermore, certain behavioural, sexual and biological attributes are constructed as natural – sexualities other than heterosexuality, a lack of desire to have children etc. are seen as unnatural and ‘wrong’. Emphasis is placed on marriage and the nuclear family – the term ‘woman’ is often used interchangeably with ‘wife’ and ‘mother’; a ‘man’ is presumed to be a ‘husband’ and a ‘father’. Other femininities and masculinities (see Connell 1995) as well as non-marital gendered social relations (between opposite sex and same sex friends, old people etc.) are largely muted. This emic emphasis lead me to focus in this study on gender in marital and family relationships even though there are many other dimensions that might be of interest.

Lastly, Pentecostal authority is largely articulated in terms of gender – using notions of female connotated ‘submission’ and male connotated ‘responsibility’. In this context, men ought to be ‘submissive’ ‘sons’ or ‘brides (of Jesus)’ – but only in their relationship with divinely ‘called’ men in higher ranks than themselves and with God. On the other hand, women’s occupations in the church and their private households are

¹⁸ Much of American and European feminism perceives Christianity as the epitome of patriarchal power and as instrumental in the oppression of women (Mascia-Lees and Johnson Black 2000: 5-6). A relational approach invites us to look instead at the construction of gendered identities and at how oppressions may be reproduced through an unexamined reproduction of such gender identities (Butler 1988: 523).

¹⁹ Austin-Broos’ insightful study of Jamaican Pentecostalism (1997) is one of the few works that perceives gender in a relational way.

referred to as ‘helping’ husbands or ‘assisting’ male pastors, even if no man contributes to carrying out their tasks (whether that is cooking or preaching).

If gender relations are not ‘natural’, but instead “all made up” (Morris 1995), fundamentally unstable and contestable, how do they come into place? With Butler’s notion of *performativity* (e.g. 1988) gender is constituted in and through performative acts, in a constant *citational process* (Armour and St. Ville 2006).

[G]ender is in no way a stable identity or locus of agency from which various acts proceed; rather it is an identity tenuously constituted in time – an identity instituted through *stylized repetition of acts*. Further, gender is instituted through the stylization of the body and, hence, must be understood as the mundane way in which bodily gestures, movements, and enactments of various kinds constitute the illusion of an abiding gendered self (Butler 1988: 519, emphasis in original).

In this view, gender is not something that one ‘has’; men and women need to be “*doing gender*” (Butler 1988: 521, emphasis on original): “(...) to be a woman is to have *become* a woman, to compel the body to conform to an historical idea of ‘woman’, to induce the body to become a cultural sign (...)” (ibid.: 522, emphasis in original). This is strikingly similar to the ways Pentecostal converts need to be *doing Pentecostalism* by reproducing Pentecostal behavioural, discursive and bodily norms. In both cases, the self actively engages with gender and religious norms. This, however, is not a free process, but influenced by the availability of specific *subject positions* (Hollway 1984) as well as emotional, material, social, economical benefits and sanctioning (Moore 1994: 63-65, in reference to Hollway 1984).

Some work on gender in Christianity asks about the restrictions or space for freedom that church or religion offer women: “The Church: equality or patriarchy?” asks Sawyer (1996). Adogame and Chitando see African women as ‘empowered’ through religious practices and community: “religion (...) gives the women a firm sense of identity and equips them to face a harsh and uncertain social environment” (2005: 261). If we accept the critique of a functionalist and dichotomous view and accept that the formation of subjectivity involves more than strategic manipulation of circumstances, then whether

women are ‘empowered’ to ‘resist’ patriarchal or political forces is an inadequate question to ask.

In the performative formation of the Pentecostal gendered self, the centre of power lies in the process of the utterance, not necessarily with specific people. But both gender and religious authority become manifest in and through people, in their relationships with the world and themselves: in men and women, in pastors and congregations. The strong Pentecostal emphasis on ‘submission’ to specific persons (foremost husbands and pastors)²⁰ raises the question of the *agency* of the Pentecostal self.²¹ If people subconsciously reproduce norms, training to blindly submit to others, is their religious experience really ‘theirs’? Do they have any influence at all in exercising agency, in shifting the norms?

Bourdieu’s influential notion of *habitus* locates the production of subjectivity very deeply in social structures:

[P]ractices of the members of the same group (...) are always more and better harmonized than the agents know or wish, because, as Leibniz again says, ‘following only (his) own laws’, each ‘nonetheless agrees with the other’. The habitus is precisely this immanent law, inscribed into the body by identical histories (Bourdieu 1990: 59).

In this model, social change does occur, but not out of a ‘free choice’ by the individual agents. However, as we shall see, neither an emancipatory approach to religious ‘empowerment’, nor a paralysing determination of a collective habitus seems to do justice to the centrality of divinely facilitated agency that is embodied in the concept of the Holy Spirit as the divine agent on earth.

Instead of searching for a universal location of agency in an individual, Saba Mahmood argues for the need to go beyond an understanding of social change as resistance. She

²⁰ Note also, that in the RCCG, God in the form of the Holy Spirit is imagined as a (powerful) person.

²¹ Also relevant are questions of the possibility and conditions of ‘resistance’, which are extensively discussed in feminist and women’s studies literature. I will refer to these debates later, to discuss my empirical material around female submission in Chapter Six.

suggests adopting a more empirical approach that recognises that agency may take different meanings:

[I]f the ability to effect change in the world and in oneself is historically and culturally specific (...), then the meaning and sense of agency cannot be fixed in advance, but must emerge through an analysis of the particular concepts that enable specific modes of being, responsibility and effectivity. Viewed in this way, what may appear to be a case of deplorable passivity and docility from a progressivist point of view, may actually be a form of agency – but one that can be understood only from within the discourses and structures of subordination that create the conditions of its enactment. In this sense, agentival capacity is entailed not only in those acts that resist norms, but also in the multiple ways in which one *inhabits* norms (Mahmood 2005: 14-15, emphasis in original).

A (Western) feminist dismissal of women's engagement in religious conservative movements as indicator for female 'oppression' tells us more about liberal conception of freedom and agency than about the agency of religious women (Mahmood 2005: 1ff). In this sense, Mahmood's suggestions resonate with claims of African feminists. They remind us that appropriate activism can be shaped in different ways (Nnaemeka 2005, Kolawole 2004; see also Chapter Four). The focus of the thesis on issues of (self-) discipline and submission/responsibility is hence derived from an emic, gendered understanding of Pentecostal authority. It is this approach that allows us to see the ambivalences that are inherent in Pentecostal conceptualisations of power. The reproduction of a Pentecostal regime of power is then complicated by the "fundamentally unstable and ambiguous" ethics (Marshall 2009: 164), that give rise to flexible negotiation processes (and social change) in order to cope with complex moral dilemmas.

Mobility in London-Lagos

The third set of literature this thesis touches upon, migration theory, has at times assumed that people migrate from one place of origin to one place of residence, where they eventually settle. From the 1950s this dichotomous framework was somewhat

differentiated (e.g. by identifying different ‘types’ of migration). However, as Basch et al. note, migration studies are often still often state-based and tend to understand ‘nation’ in a positivist way (2003: 30). Marked by a paradigm of *methodological nationalism* - as Wimmer and Glick Schiller (2002) rightly point out - such studies take the nation state as a ‘natural’ basic unit of analysis and construct migrants as socially marginal and as exceptions to the rule of territorial confinement. Furthermore, migrants are often portrayed as passive, following the pulls and pushes of circumstances beyond their influence. Rather than viewing migration as a complex social process that involves communication and interaction from all sides, studies may encourage debates about degrees, stages and conditions of, as well as resistance to, the adoption of the ‘host’ culture and the gradual shedding of the culture of ‘origin’.²² Viewed in such a light, migration appears to be an inherently disruptive ‘event’, a rift between the life ‘before’ elsewhere and life ‘after’ in Europe. It is bound to be particularly important and cause turmoil in a person’s life trajectory, and marks them as ‘other’. More recent studies have paid more attention to complexities by investigating migrants’ own narratives, the psychological impact of immigration policies, gender aspects, migrants’ networks and contacts with ‘home’, as well as material remittances (e.g. Anthias 2000). Such studies enrich the landscape of migration theories considerably; however, they do not break with an essentialising notion of ‘different’ and thus somehow problematic or troubled ‘migrants’.

Fuelled by centre-right populist scaremongering about immigrant ‘invasions’ or ‘floods’, debates about political ‘integration’, social ‘costs’ and cultural ‘contributions’ have exploded throughout Europe within the last few decades.²³ Even though widely practised in many societies, multiculturalism has regularly been declared dead.²⁴ My study only indirectly refers to these political and media debates, in order not to reproduce their assumptions. Instead, this thesis concentrates on the interaction between

²² ‘Culture’ often overlaps with ‘race’ and ‘nationality’.

²³ By no means are such debates new: see e.g. Enoch Powell’s ‘Rivers of Blood’ speech, 20-04-1968; <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/comment/3643823/Enoch-Powells-Rivers-of-Blood-speech.html> [accessed 02-09-2011]. But it seems to me that there is a current tendency in Europe that sees such views as increasingly acceptable (again).

²⁴ E.g. by the German Chancellor Merkel in October 2010 and by the British Prime Minister Cameron in February 2011. See <http://www.welt.de/videos/politik/article10340788/Merkel-haelt-Multikulti-fuer-absolut-gescheitert.html#autoplay> [accessed 13-09-2011] and <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-12371994> [accessed 13-09-2011].

migration and religion. It portrays moral questions from a Nigerian Pentecostal perspective by looking at the ways in which Christian migrants conceptualise and claim agency and participation.

As discussed above, Pentecostalism maintains strong notions of rupture in the forms of re-birth and rapture. It thus potentially undermines, counterbalances or reinforces assumptions about migratory disruption and continuity. I fully acknowledge that mainstream discourses are powerful in the sense that they produce policies, realities and identities. They set the scene against which Pentecostal Nigerian subjectivities in London are formed. However, I approach these interactions with European society and the 'state' mainly from the perspectives of Nigerian Pentecostals, leaving open whether and when they are 'migrants', 'children of God' or 'missionaries'. This approach towards a Nigerian Pentecostal perspective aims on one hand to counterbalance a state-centric perspective on migration; on the other hand it intends to reveal racist and discriminatory liberal discourses that are inherent in immigration, family and child welfare policies and to demonstrate the necessity of re-visiting concepts of migrant *integration* in favour of a more dialogical framework.

It is true that the members of the RCCG whom I worked with are mostly people who grew up in Nigeria and are of Yoruba descent. They are hence part of a 'group' that is marked by religious, ethnic and national boundaries. However, on the political grounds that I explained above I am cautious about viewing them as a clearly defined 'migrant community'. In order "(not) to think about ethnicity" Wimmer (2007) suggests the need to base research about migration in institutions where interactions are marked by factors other than ethnicity and nationality (ibid.: 29). In my case, it is the common religious beliefs and RCCG membership of my research participants which has allowed for comparison; but simultaneously such an approach allows for 'frayed' group borders that prevent essentialising assumptions.

Matters of nationality and nationalism play a significant role in both the RCCG members' individual subject formation and the church's and members' relationship with British society. Nigerian Pentecostals are embedded in wider power relations and encounter the strong, Europe-wide stigmatisation of Nigerian nationals as ruthless

fraudsters. Pentecostals reject such a notion for themselves, but often accept it to describe ‘other’ Nigerians. Furthermore, the particularly strong rise of Pentecostalism in Nigeria is frequently used to imply a moral ‘spearhead’ function, that makes ‘being proud to be Nigerian’ a highly ambiguous matter. At several points in the thesis, I will elaborate more on the linkages of Nigerian-dominated Pentecostalism in London with a Nigerian nationalist project. For now, it suffices to say that – even though I reject a simplistic ‘home away from home’ approach – the question of churches as a moral, social and political force is tainted by Nigerian nationalist matters.

Ethnic aspects cannot be ignored either, especially if we try to grasp issues of spiritual practice. There are several recent anthropological studies that give witness to the continuities of Yoruba thought and cosmology with Nigerian Christian practices in London. Making use of the extensive Africanist literature on Yoruba in Nigeria, they establish that the ways people view their trajectories and aims in the migration context are strongly influenced by Yoruba notions of ‘power’ (*agbára*) (Harris 2006), ‘destiny’ (*orí*) (Doubleday 2008) and ‘well-being’ (or ‘peace’; *àláfíà*) (Botticello 2009a). These authors’ categories indicate a certain vagueness around the edges – Botticello refers to her participants as Yoruba-Nigerians, while Doubleday calls them Yoruba-Londoners. However, I feel that they both take the existence of ‘the’ Yoruba society/culture for granted, if not in London, then at least in Nigeria.

But “[w]hat is often called cultural memory or tradition in both the African diaspora and at home is, in truth, always a function of power, negotiation and strategic re-creation” (Matory 1999: 97). In accordance with Matory’s statement, my material has shown that self-labelling processes, as black, African, Nigerian, Yoruba, or indeed as British, are highly situational, flexible and often interchangeably used. Furthermore, ‘Yoruba’ is itself a category trans-atlantically conceived in the nineteenth century in the dynamics and encounters of the transatlantic slave trade and during missionisation and colonialism in West Africa (Peel 2000). “[A]s a political and cultural identity uniting Ife, Oyo, and other groups, Yoruba-ness was created in the Creole society of the [West African] Coast, in a place and in a time that put it in constant dialogue with the nations of the Afro-Latin diaspora” (Matory 1999: 82).

Does the numerical and infrastructural significance of Nigerian Pentecostal churches combined with a certain political and ethnic flavour make ‘Nigerian Pentecostals’ in London a *diaspora*? Much of the vast body of literature on diasporas aims at a recognition of political engagement, self-definitions and solidarity among migrants and people with migrant ‘heritage’. It highlights their sidelining through processes of ‘othering’ by normalising ‘mainstream’ society. Werbner (2002) defines diasporas as transnational networks that are connected through ties of co-responsibility; they are highly politicised social formations. Diaspora studies acknowledge the various connections with a homeland, but emphasises that a diaspora is something new, an identity or a ‘place’ in its own right (ibid.).²⁵ However, the concept of diaspora describes a social formation and hence lacks the flexibility to describe the full extent of the spiritual dimensions that are crucial for the morality (or co-responsibility) in the RCCG and their understanding of political involvement.²⁶ When I refer to the RCCG members I worked with, I mostly use the term ‘Nigerian’ (Pentecostals); however, the reader is asked to understand this neither as referring exclusively to a connection with the Nigerian nation or state, nor as a closed or permanent category. Rather it overlaps with the descriptive categorisations that I have mentioned above. Where single elements of self-formation (such as nationality or ethnicity) become relevant, I will explicate this.

So far, I have established that there is no simple notion of the RCCG members, or Nigerian Pentecostals in general, being a migrant ‘community’ marked by ethnicity and nationality. Rather than taking certain borders for granted, I adopt a “boundary-making paradigm” (Wimmer 2007: 13). Going even further, we can ask: are they ‘migrants’? Globalisation studies from the 1990s or so have focused on the development of increasing connections worldwide. This mainly economic perspective has given rise to the related paradigm of *transnationalism* in migration studies. According to Basch, Glick Schiller and Szanton Blanc’s influential book (2003 [1994]), transnationalism is a ‘toolkit’ to analyse transnational migrants’ experience, “the process by which immigrants forge and sustain multi-stranded social relations that link together their societies of origin and settlement”; *transmigrants* are “[i]mmigrants who develop and

²⁵ The precise definitions and relationships with *home* vary. See e.g. Clifford (1994), Cohen (1997), Lavie and Swedenburg (1996).

²⁶ When I refer to the RCCG, Nigerian Pentecostals or Nigerians as a diaspora, I do so in a mainstream (non-spiritual) understanding of diaspora as a social and political formation.

maintain multiple relationships – familial, economic, social, organisational, religious, and political – that span borders” (Basch et al. 2003: 7). The concept of transnationalism disentangles nation state territory, inhabitants and culture/society. It commits to not “subsuming migrants immediately in the assimilative logics of the nation state paradigm” (Apitzsch and Siouti 2007: 15), without, however, ignoring the impact of the global structure of nation states (Glick Schiller et al. 2006: 613). New questions that this approach gave rise to have involved issues such as: migrants’ biographies, historical studies, back and forth movements and circular migration, and a material, ideological and social “double engagement” (Grillo and Mazzucato 2010) in more than one state. As such, it also allows for an embodiment perspective on migration: bodies that move and carry their history and socialisation as internalised practices with them wherever they go (Harding 2006: 17).

Transnationalism’s focus on networks and its openness concerning the nature, frequency and direction of movements are useful in describing Nigerians’ intention or actual habit of travelling back and forth. However, Botticello (2009a) as well as Doubleday (2008) point out that migration and travels are part of a much wider Yoruba concept of social mobility and ‘expansion’. Furthermore, for Pentecostal Christians, the most important ‘rupture’ or identity formation process may not be their migration, but their ‘conversion career’.²⁷ This prompts us to recognise the limits of *transnational migration*: while transgressing the ‘nation (state)’, it also reproduces it by mostly examining migration processes in relation to (material or immaterial) border crossings. Hence, where I am referring to movement in reference to the nation state and/or border crossings, I maintain the terms migrant and (trans-)migration, within a transnationalism paradigm. Where I aim to emphasise the connections of migration, border crossings and other travels with wider dynamics of social and spiritual ‘improvement’, I use *mobility*.

A more open mobility-approach is supported by Fumanti’s study into *virtuous citizenship* (2010). He describes how Ghanaian Methodists construct their active participation in the British state through religious belonging without actually being recognised by ‘real’ state institutions (e.g. the Home Office). Even though the

²⁷ The term *conversion career* was coined by a research program at the Free University of Amsterdam which ended in 2008. Conversion in this sense can be marked by one or several dramatic events or be a ‘lifelong experience’. See also Klaver (2011).

Ghanaians consciously refer to it, the British nation state itself does not have the means (or indeed the will) to reward such spiritually and morally based efforts to participate in British society with legal rights. In a similar logic of legitimacy by virtuousness, RCCG pastors and members sometimes construct themselves as ‘missionaries’ rather than ‘migrants’, who were sent to ‘save’ the spiritually dark continent of Europe (see also Chapter Eight). Migration to London is part of a wider ‘journey of life’ (Doubleday 2008: 187) of Nigerian Christians.

In between and across nation state borders, mobile Nigerian Pentecostals form new “multi-layered, multi-sited *transnational social fields*, encompassing those who move and those who stay behind” (Levitt and Glick Schiller 2004: 1003, my emphasis; see also Basch et al. 1994, Glick Schiller 2004).²⁸ Transnational social fields are a means “to re-think societies if we do not take national boundaries for granted” (Levitt and Glick Schiller 2004: 1005). They involve travels, networks, communications, material exchange and “new specific forms of consciousness” (Apitzsch and Siouti 2007: 16). Their multiple layers and poles are constituted and held together by practices and experiences, religious and otherwise. Mobile people are “living lives that incorporate daily activities, routines, and institutions located both in a destination country and transnationally” (Levitt and Glick Schiller 2004: 1003).

It is the notion of *simultaneity* (see also e.g. Grillo and Mazzucato 2008) that is most useful for my purposes in examining notions and effects of mobility among Nigerian Pentecostals. As most of the people’s lives evolve (simultaneously) around the poles of both London and Lagos, I refer to their transnational social field as *London-Lagos*.²⁹ However, I agree with Fumanti and Werbner who critique the failure of the idea of the transnational social field to conceptualise specific internal stratifications.³⁰

²⁸ I use transnational social field interchangeably with transnational social space (e.g. Faist 2000). The latter is influential in the German context of transnational migration research. Usually used in plural as *transnationale soziale Räume* (see Apitzsch and Siouti 2007: 18), the term *spaces (Räume)* points perhaps more to the complexity and multi-dimensionality of *mobility* than the term *fields*.

²⁹ This is my term and is not used by my informants.

³⁰ Note, though, that in a later article, Glick Schiller (2005) emphasises the impact of global power structures on transnational social fields.

Constructs such as the ‘transnational social field’ (Levitt and Glick Schiller 2004) are useful but fail to theorise the fact that transnational connections are always specifically shaped (...), increasingly ruptured as migrants create new configurations and loyalties, and inflected by new encounters in the place settlement (Fumanti and Werbner 2010: 5).

In the case of the Pentecostals’ London-Lagos, transmigrants also belong to a *transcendental social field* - the ‘Kingdom of God’. Within the RCCG, spiritual and national social dimensions strongly overlap and interact. Like transnational social fields, the Kingdom of God is constituted and expanded by the distribution of certain goods such as religious DVDs between Nigeria and London, which are thought to impact on people’s spiritual lives.³¹

The national and the spiritual frameworks of London-Lagos bear different moral connotations, are constituted by different practices and have their own special outcomes. But the Kingdom of God and the transnational migratory space are also inextricably intertwined: the experience of Lagos-bred people of a “pentecostally infused – or better: *pentecostalite*”³² (Meyer 2004a: 92, emphasis in original) Southern Nigeria tints perceptions of, and practices in, London.

Even though the role and importance of the nation state in Nigerian Pentecostals’ realities are variable, London-Lagos is by no means an undefined and ‘open’ space. Beyond the influence of states and God’s Kingdom, postcolonial relations and history form a third dimension in its constitution. Thus the theatre group of one South London RCCG parish staged a play to contribute to the Black History Month (BHM). In contrast to other BHM events, the theatre play celebrated British Missionary efforts under colonial rule and embedded Nigerian (Christian) migration in the duty to bring the gospel ‘back’ to a morally deteriorating Britain.³³

³¹ The RCCG has its own film industry – Dove Media – and participates in the ‘conversion’ of popular culture throughout Nigeria and beyond (see Ukah 2004: 229, footnote 8).

³² The term stands for “expressive forms that signify Pentecostalism and the proliferation” (Meyer 2004a: 92), which are adopted in areas of life beyond the religious sphere, in Meyer’s case in the entertainment industry in Ghana.

³³ Fieldnotes, 31-10-2008.

London-Lagos is further constituted by ethnic concepts around the *circulation* of money, goods and especially the self, which mark Yoruba perceptions of personhood (Botticello 2009a: 13). It contextualises travel in its various forms (back and forth, far and near, male and female, etc.) and its intentions (visiting/re-uniting family, trading, etc.) in efforts to further one's destiny, and allows people to make a different sense of 'illegality' as spiritually connotated 'blockages'.

All these dimensions (and possibly more) are embodied in three patterns of mobility in London-Lagos: 1) of people, by the way they structure families and other social networks, responsibilities and individual agency; 2) of material goods, by the way they impact on the demand for certain kinds of commodities (e.g. specialist foods, clothes, cars, etc.) and the ways they are transported (e.g. smuggled); and 3) of the moral discourses that circulate in and between London and Lagos, especially around trust and suspicion of others in relation to families and business, moral questions concerning material wealth, violence and security, social ranking, childcare and sexuality.³⁴

The RCCG UK and its members may not be a 'migrant community' in a conventional sense, but the migrant experience is certainly crucially important for them. However, it is significantly influenced by religious, ethnic and historical elements and the different moralities that come with them. The people I worked with referred to themselves as Yoruba, Nigerian, African, Black and Christian in overlapping, hyphenated or interchangeable senses. This indicates that the inner stratifications of a trans(national) social field are not fixed, but rather situational and negotiable. Furthermore, if we consider the different moral connotations, the flexibility in self-ascriptions is a political process rather than a form of inaccuracy.

I suggest that the situational and flexible *backgrounding/foregrounding* of certain matters is a mode with which London-Lagos as a condition of simultaneity and hence ambivalence is handled by Nigerian Pentecostals. This claim allows us not only to look at the different elements that shape mobility-related transnational social fields such as London-Lagos; it also allows us to see how the different moralities that accompany the

³⁴ I am here comparing Smith 2007 and my own fieldwork experiences in Nigeria with my material in London. Much of this will re-appear in later chapters.

different dimensions are negotiated and reconciled. Background and foreground are mutually constituted, as Coleman explains (forthcoming). He uses the example of the famous picture of a young woman/old woman (see Illustration 1), in which the two ‘potentialities’ (‘old woman’ and ‘young woman’) “depend on each other for their existence; they inhabit the same space; and yet they cannot both occupy the foregrounded consciousness of the brain at the same time” (ibid.).



Illustration 1: Young woman/old woman, optical illusion.

Through backgrounding/foregrounding specific features or dimensions in London-Lagos seem sometimes to be compressed. For example, RCCG members who have been in London for more than a decade often referred to moral discourses that they were familiar with from a Nigerian context. However, they appeared to be similar to the sexual conservatism that Cornwall (1996, 2001) describes for the early 1990s. At least

for urban Southeastern Nigeria, Smith describes an increasing acceptance of premarital sex (Smith 2010).

Within London-Lagos, spatial dimensions can also be flexibly adapted: London can be constructed as much closer to Lagos than, say, to other European cities. Tunde is the brother of an RCCG member and himself a Nigerian Pentecostal Londoner. He says:

To me, I believe London is a Lagos extension. To me, the way I see it. If you compare Lagos to Paderborn now, (...) there is a wide gap in-between the two. But the way life is in Lagos, it's almost a similar way life is here [in London].³⁵

I have found that Lagos and London are often constructed as one single religio-political field. Many liken the two places as busy and chaotic megacities where people struggle for money, jobs, social status, but also for morality. Similarly, Doubleday's interlocutors describe London as a marketplace that could be located anywhere (2008: 98). However, this is not to say that people like Tunde are not simultaneously acutely aware of the distance that the national borders between Nigeria and Europe can cause. In the same interview, he tells me that he has lived for years with the fears that accompany the reality of being an overstayer in Germany.

So far, this introductory chapter has embedded the study in its social and media context in the UK. It has outlined my approach to Pentecostalism as lived religion and flexible discursive and bodily practices. I have argued that moral authority and power relations are central to how Pentecostalism shapes RCCG members' experience of life in, and beyond, the church. These power relations are highly gendered on different levels. I have shown that Pentecostals stretch a traditional understanding of migration by moulding, inhabiting and travelling a transnational social and spiritual space. Perhaps most importantly though, this study breaks with traditional theoretical boundaries of academic disciplines. It brings together the study of migration, Pentecostal Christianity and gender relations, but not only to complement each other in an 'add-on' fashion. I will demonstrate that they also cross-fertilise and push the boundaries of the internal

³⁵ Paderborn is a medium big town in Germany where he had lived before. Interview, 19-05-2009.

debates in each individual theoretical field. Looking at Pentecostalism within a migration context forces us to take the interaction of religious doctrines with everyday life into account. It prompts us to leave the confinements of the church to examine more accurately where the boundaries of a Pentecostal sphere are actually drawn, in religious homes, bodily appearances and in a city space that is in the process of being missionised. Looking at gendered forms of power sheds new light on the workings of complex Pentecostal hierarchies and modes of agency *through* submission. And a religious lens allows us to see how migrants make sense of their environment and how they negotiate a morally complex migration situation, using what I will later call *smartness*.

Chapter Outline

[I]f our creation of an ‘Anthropology of Christianity’ is an act of foregrounding the religion for analytical purposes, this must always be a temporary analytical move, to be ‘backgrounded’ by other framings of the worlds that we try to understand (Coleman forthcoming).

Rather than reproducing essentialist religious, gender, national and ethnic categories, this thesis aims to show some of the complexity of social processes in the lives of Nigerian-born Christians in London. To facilitate this approach, I have conceptualised religion, gender relations and migration, above, as embodied practices of self formation that are stratified by power relations and authority. However, the degree to which the text is able to grasp such intertwinements is restricted by the linearity of any written document. Pentecostals negotiate practical morality by backgrounding/foregrounding certain aspects of their self, and situationally prioritise different identities, power positions, associations and strategies. Similarly, the chapters sometimes foreground institutional or doctrinal aspects, sometimes they foreground lived realities. At any given time, one of the gender/religion/migration dimensions is more pronounced than the others. However, the reader is asked to bear in mind that the aspects that are

temporarily foregrounded for analytical purposes cannot be divorced from the aspects in the background against which they are constructed.

All chapters include empirical material and all (except Chapter Two) start with a vignette that aims to take the reader deeper into the context. However, the chapters also refer to the relevant theoretical and wider empirical literature there and then.

The first chapter takes a step back to gain an overview regarding how the empirical material, upon which the argument builds, was obtained. It reflects on the circumstances and methodology of the research. It draws on a paradigm of *conversion* to assess my professional and personal involvement with the research work, Pentecostal practices and the research participants.

The second and third chapters introduce the reader to the Redeemed Christian Church of God (RCCG), its doctrines, practices and institutional mechanisms on different levels. Chapter Three looks at the RCCG and its members in the UK. It particularly introduces the situation in 'Nigerian' Southeast London and the RCCG parish where my own learning processes began. Both the local Yoruba-Nigerian infrastructure as well as church activities play a big role in many Nigerian Pentecostals' subjectivities. Chapter Four concentrates on dynamics between the leadership of the pastor and the active participation of the congregation on a local level, as well as the way they are deeply gendered and linked with questions of authority on an international scale.

Chapters Five, Six and Seven look at how gendered forms of authority and agency are re-negotiated and applied to a Christian lifestyle in contexts beyond the church. Each one describes a main phase in the formation of Pentecostal gendered selves: singlehood, marriage and parenthood/childhood. In parallel, the three chapters discuss the main forms of Pentecostal authority and the ways they shape Pentecostals' agency: self-discipline, the paradigm of submission and responsibility, and discipline, respectively. The body is the focus of many gendered Pentecostal practices and Pentecostal forms of power impact on its outer appearance, drives, reproductive functions, gestures and behaviour. I wish to emphasise, that all three modes of power are important in all life phases, however, the relation between self-discipline and unmarried Pentecostals' lives

is particularly prominent and discussed together in Chapter Five. Self-discipline is the way to impact positively on one's material and marital future success by subjugating one's worldly body and desires and by engaging in intensive religious practices geared to enlarge one's faith. Subjugation and agency are inextricably intertwined, causing tension and sometimes shame. Chapter Six discusses marriage relationships under the paradigms of (female) submission and (male) responsibility on which they are based. There are stark ambivalences inherent in the Pentecostal notions of a marriage as a triangular relationship between man, woman and God. This leads to a notion of female agency *through* submission that goes beyond a simplistic understanding of 'oppression' of women. Chapter Seven concentrates on discipline in relationships between members of a family. Disciplining children is the means by which children learn to live according to Pentecostal morality. It is conceptualised as a training process that involves internalisation of morals through bodily practices and repetitions. 'Discipline' may involve physical forms of punishment. This aspect is the ground for frictions with British legal and welfare institutions and results in a feeling of disempowerment among Nigerian Pentecostal parents. Agency, here, is restored only under the circumstances of an encapsulated Christian family space.

Chapter Eight looks at how RCCG members negotiate the conflicting morals of different regimes of discipline and morality (Pentecostal, national and economic). A Pentecostal logic of 'sowing and reaping' and ways of being *smart* are modes with which moral controversies can be flexibly navigated while simultaneously Pentecostal doctrines can be accommodated. Some of those 'smooth navigation' skills are derived from a Nigerian context and adapted to a British environment. The eighth chapter does three things. It is firstly an extension of the previous three chapters by exploring the economic basis of Pentecostal individuals and families. Secondly, it continues the examination of a Pentecostal Nigerian conceptualisation of their 'place' in wider British society and the liberal nation state – an issue which the seventh chapter raises with its assessment of conflicts around child rearing. And thirdly, it connects the empirical gender and family based section back to the wider social context in Southeast London (with and beyond its Yoruba/Nigerian infrastructure) that I have explored in the beginning, in Chapter Three. This time around, in Chapter Eight, we are able to

examine an engagement in such an ethnically and morally hybrid environment in more depth.

Chapters Three and Eight are explicitly about the relationship and interaction of the RCCG and their members with the ‘outside’ of the church. The larger part of the thesis – Chapters Four, Five, Six and Seven – is about the formation of a gendered, mobile Pentecostal self ‘inside’. However, this formation of the self occurs against the backdrop of an outside and is thus equally telling about the drawing of a moral boundary.

The Conclusion goes back to the question of encapsulation and shows that the concept of *integration* assumes unequal power relations. It is true that the constitution of gendered Pentecostal selves in the RCCG occurs against the backdrop of a moral boundary towards non-Pentecostals that may be reinforced in a context of mobility in London. But Pentecostalism – at least in the RCCG version – also forms empowered, *smart* selves who are well-equipped in self-analysing, adapting and interacting with heterogeneous social and political environments. Even though European concepts such as integration may not describe their activities adequately, Nigerian Pentecostals no doubt seek to participate, contribute and transform British society into a ‘better’ place.

In the thesis, all names, including the names of pastors and parishes are anonymised. The exception is RCCG Jesus House, which has been the object of previous social scientific study (Hunt and Lightley 2001, Hunt 2001, Ukah 2009). Social scientific concepts are written in italic; they can be distinguished from emic terms, which are in single inverted commas. To allow for easier reading, both, academic concepts as well as emic terms are usually only marked when they first appear. All direct quotations from other literature or research participants are in double inverted commas. Biblical references refer to the King James Version unless otherwise stated. All illustrations and photographs can be found in the appendix, along with a list of novels that I found relevant and inspiring during my research period and while writing up.

Chapter Two

Fishing for Souls and Research Participants

“[I]f you are seriously willing to listen, then you have begun to convert.”
(Harding 1987: 178)

This opening chapter provides insight into the development of the research, its methods and encounters, alongside a discussion of my own white unmarried female ‘subject position’ (Moore 2005), as well as the relationships between me and the research participants. I will illustrate the intertwining of methods and positionalities by drawing on the idea of *conversion*. The conversion processes and practices of Nigerian migrants to Pentecostalism were part of my set of interview questions; at the same time, researching into religious conversion was meant to advance my own conversion to the Anthropology of Pentecostalism. To complicate matters even further, in many situations, this boundary became blurred and it was no longer clear whether I was converted to Pentecostal faith practices or whether my informants were converted to an anthropological perspective.

The Research Field

The research on which this thesis is built was mainly carried out between June 2008 and September 2009. For its purpose, I had moved from Berlin to Britain in September 2007 and relocated to Peckham in Southeast London in mid July 2008. The *research at home* versus *research abroad* distinction which is often made in anthropological

methodological literature (e.g. Jackson 1987) does not work for my context. Of course, many things in the UK and in my research context were new to me. However, with respect to the everyday organisation of bank accounts, tenancy agreement and using public transport, Britain hardly seemed foreign. I had lived in West Africa and carried out research with West Africans in Berlin, and it was sometimes easier to adjust to Nigerian social life than to British academic culture.

Within London, I did and simultaneously did not live among my research participants. My house was in the middle of an area where many RCCG and other Black Majority Churches are located and where many of their members live, work and shop. Large numbers of my neighbours, corner shop owners, bank and post office employees, pharmacists and so on were Nigerian-born. We had the same GP and I received flyers from African Pentecostal churches through my door. However, the people I spent most of my non-research time with happened to be neither Nigerian nor Pentecostal.

Whether I was ‘in’ my *research field* depended on whether the activities, places and people at a particular time seemed to be ‘Nigerian Pentecostal’ or not – for example I felt usually felt particularly ‘out of the field’ when I went for a walk in the park or had a beer in the pub, because they were activities my interlocutors did not usually do. Sometimes I could decide whether I had ‘done research’ only retrospectively. A visit to an RCCG member’s shop could either turn out to just be a chat with a friend or an informal interview with a research participant, depending on what we happened to talk about and how much time she had in between customers. This co-existence of parallel ‘fields’ of social relations and activities is however typical for life in London. People go about their own business, struggling to make a living, trying to maintain their most significant relations and only meeting others at intersections of these ‘fields’.

My research focus was much more pronounced for myself as well as the participants when I participated in and around the RCCG’s institutionalised life. However, I share with Doubleday (2008) the aim to see the wider impact of Nigerian Pentecostalism in the project of individuals’ self-realisation. In my research, people often said that being ‘born-again’ was an all-encompassing ‘lifestyle’. Thus I placed a big emphasis on

asking questions that targeted their views on life beyond the church, accompanying them into streets, homes and work life.

The fluidity of the notion of RCCG membership³⁶ in combination with the aim to transgress church boundaries made the circle of people I worked with somewhat erratic. But Adogame and Chitando support the necessity of such an approach: “Any tendency to gauge essentially on the locus of attendance and church-oriented religiosity may obscure the complexity of any local religious landscape” (2005: 256). As an alternative, Vasquez (2008) suggests the value of working on religious networks of people rather than on the church as institution, to grasp the particular dynamics of “religion in motion”. Different from other, more structuralist or functionalist network studies, his practice-oriented approach focuses attention on dynamics of power. I did not just include religious networks, but also followed (often transnational) networks of kinship and friendship. Religious and other networks often overlap. This highlights the unsustainability of a modernist notion that a religious sphere is fundamentally different from the state and the secular. My approach thus goes beyond Vasquez’s notion of religious networks as ‘counter publics’ - “alternative spaces of sociability in tension with the normalising power of the state” (Vasquez 2008: 171). I suggest that the relationship between a religious network and the state is much more complex than the encapsulated scenario Vasquez describes or approaches that see the church as a bubble-like ‘home away from home’ (Adogame 1998).

Combining different elements into a fluid and changeable notion, my ‘field’ was demarcated by a vague and open mixture of social networks, activities and places, following the logic of ‘Pentecostalism as a lifestyle’ as a *Leitmotif*. It is precisely this open and eclectic approach that allowed me to see the complexities and ambivalences around gendered processes of boundary drawing and the dynamics of authority in which they are embedded, as analysed in later chapters. From the experience of previous research in African Pentecostal churches in Germany, I was aware that the RCCG would probably offer activities to spend almost every day there. To avoid losing track of

³⁶ Most parishes only consider committed volunteer ‘church workers’ as members and all others as ‘visitors’. After church workers have undergone water baptism and the standardised ‘workers’ training’, they get a membership certificate that is recognised in RCCG parishes worldwide. However, lacking the exact church statistics, I include all regular attendants of Sunday church services and distinguish them from irregular or one-off visitors.

the socio-political context of the church, I employed a double-pronged approach during the first months. On one hand I started to negotiate access to the RCCG. I attended relevant church activities such as the bi-annual all-night church service Festival of Life (FoL) and the RCCG-dominated Total Women Ministries' (TWM) women's conference where I made first contacts with attendants. I also interviewed pastors of eight RCCG parishes in the Southeast of London and RCCG Jesus House in the Northwest. After interviewing the pastors I also attended at least one of their services, where I was usually formally introduced to the congregation. Parish pastors, the RCCG administrative structures and the members on-the-ground were very open, interested and helpful with my research, not the least because many of them are academics themselves. Attending the services of several parishes gave me some insight about variations and similarities of the parishes in size, organisation and predominant themes.

On the other hand, I 'mapped' the larger context of the RCCG: I explored the residential, religious and commercial landscape of Southeast London on foot and by bicycle at different days and times and 'hung out' specifically on the Old Kent Road; I led interviews with relevant people from local authorities, the Metropolitan police, community projects and mainline churches; I gained insights into the wider Nigerian community by visiting an Igbo home town association and shops with Nigerian ownership and/or customers. It turned out to be much more difficult to negotiate entry into such 'Nigerian' spaces than into the churches. But one close contact with a female Yoruba-Muslim hair stylist provided valuable insights into matters of style, fashion and consumption. She is the co-wife to her husband. Her three oldest children from two previous relationships live with relatives in Lagos. Her openness about herself allowed me to understand better the negotiation of women's positions as well as transnational family life. We chatted while she cut my hair or when I popped in and she did not have customers. She also let me sit and watch her and the social interactions in the shop for hours. She had many Christian customers and friends and was able to tell me about encounters with Pentecostals as an outsider.

In the course of the research, many RCCG members and others were willing to inconvenience themselves to fit me into their often manic schedule and find time to invite me to their home and daily activities such as shopping. People may have avoided

me, but no one ever directly refused to speak to me. Only very few people repeatedly postponed our appointments to the extent that I took this as a sign of refusal. More subtle forms of suspicion directed at me may have been a factor that shaped my encounters. However I often felt that I was seen as harmless due to being an unmarried white woman. Pastors as well as married men and women often seemed to want to ‘help’ me and were prepared to invest their energy in my academic and private success – perhaps similarly to the ways they would have helped a congregant or a younger sibling. Further trust-enhancing aspects of my interactions were that I was at all times open about my academic intentions as well as my private life and history and I did not try to make people tell me more than they really wanted to.

After six months I had established stable contacts with a variety of RCCG pastors and members across London. So when I prepared for a six week research period in Nigeria, I was able to follow up on personal contacts of research participants, which led me to Lagos, Ife and Ibadan. As with my Yoruba Muslim hairdresser in London, participating in or facilitating gift exchange was crucial to initiate relationships with people I did not yet know personally. Mostly (Primark) clothes went to people in Nigeria, while food and fabric for the Nigerian Londoners came back with me. Throughout most of my research period in Nigeria, I stayed in the private homes of RCCG members. I participated in RCCG church life in Redemption Camp, a Provincial headquarters’ parish, a Campus parish and a small parish that was struggling to survive, meeting pastors and members from a wide range of economic and social statuses. I learned about relations between couples, as well as parents and children, shopping, cooking and eating, about friendship between women and about University life. I felt the strains of ‘traffic’ as well as the pollution and the ‘heightened insecurity’ (Smith 2007, Marshall 2009) in the air of Lagos, organised my note-taking and ironing around the erratic electricity supply and was involved in a car accident on the dangerous Lagos – Ibadan Expressway. (The only thing I did not experience in those intense few weeks was armed robbery, but I am rather grateful for that!) Back in London, my experiences in Nigeria turned out to be much more important in deepening my research relations than I had anticipated.

From April 2009, I narrowed my research field to mainly one RCCG parish on the Old Kent Road, which I call 'Tower of God'. Simultaneously, I also followed some activities of Jesus House for contrasting purposes. In Tower of God, I participated in the majority of activities in and around the church: three to four services per week, conferences and other special events, weddings, parties, as well as the 'background activities' such as the rehearsals of the theatre group, the meetings of the Sunday School teachers, the choir rehearsals. I helped with cleaning the church and occasionally participated in the children's and teenagers' services on Sundays. I also often did my interviews with members and ministers on the church premises. 'Hanging out' before and after meetings and events gave me deeper insights into the social fabric and informal activities in the congregation. I was able to notice who was trusted with the keys to open the church, who came for one-on-one consultations with the pastor and which women did each others' hair. Over the time, I became a 'sister' was nicknamed Titilayo (Yoruba, meaning 'everlasting joy') and got to know some of the members well and spent time in their families, shops and accompanied them in their daily journeys.

Methods and Material

The bulk of the material that this thesis draws on was voice recorded and transcribed interviews, as well as participant observations documented in a field diary. However, this material is complemented by transcribed sermons and literature written by RCCG members and pastors as well as other relevant Pentecostals, relevant websites, fliers, DVDs, audio CDs, material objects, novels mostly by Nigerian-born authors and public media (especially TV, radio and newspapers) in the UK.

To a large degree, my interviews were formal, in the sense that they were announced, planned and agreed to as such and held in a situation specifically dedicated to the interview, outside normal everyday activities.³⁷ I conducted seventy-three of such formally pre-planned interviews. Out of these, sixteen were conducted in Nigeria, fifty-

³⁷ A few of those interviews as well as some field visits were carried out jointly with Simon Coleman. I indicate in the thesis where this was the case. The analysis of the jointly acquired material is my own. However much credit I owe to these occasional collaborations and to those who have supported or advised me, the responsibility for the outcome, omission and errors included, is entirely my own.

four in London. Of the sixteen in Nigeria, nine were done with RCCG ministers of various ranks, although the seven other interview partners were all committed and active Pentecostal Christians, too. Half of my interview partners in Nigeria were women, half men. In London, I conducted ten of the fifty-four interviews with RCCG pastors. The other interviews were conducted with twenty-five RCCG members and five Christians closely related to RCCG members – some of which I interviewed more than once. Out of my forty interview partners in London, nineteen were women and twenty-one men. The vast majority were married, only eight (four men, four women) were unmarried at the time of the interview. Two of the eight got married during the course of my research, and a third while I was writing up. Most interviews were one-on-one situations, but I also conducted interviews with five married couples. Most of these usually one to two hour long interviews were conducted before or after a church activity.

Beyond those formal interviews, I had many short conversations throughout the research period either with RCCG members, their friends, relatives, spouses, customers and others whom I did not know well, or with research participants I came to know beyond a one-off interview. In London, there were three participants whom I got to know especially closely and visited or accompanied often, whose families and networks I met and whom I telephoned often to obtain news or just to say hello. Danny, Rachel and Femi will be introduced later and reappear throughout the thesis as case studies. In Nigeria, I stayed with a couple in Lagos – Toyin and her husband Samuel - and one family in Ife. This allowed me to get to know them well within a very short time. Both Toyin and Samuel grew up in Lagos. Samuel lived in Togo for a while to work. Toyin's brother and his wife own a corner shop near where I live. She and her twin sister are the only siblings who were not born while her parents were in the UK and therefore they do not have British citizenship, unlike their brother and sisters. Even though three siblings and the mother live in London, she has not been able to obtain a visa to visit them. Samuel has a regular full-time job in a bank, but the RCCG, its pastors and activities are the focus of both their lives. Samuel and Toyin met in Redemption Camp and spent part of their honeymoon there.

My interviews and questions were continually shaped and re-shaped in a ‘Grounded Theory’ (Glaser and Strauss 1967) sense and evolved in the research process through the information and interview experience I obtained along the way. Generally, throughout the whole research however, I had four thematic areas I was interested in: Firstly, personal backgrounds – including childhood and education; secondly, the role of Christian belief and the church in their life; thirdly, everyday life in London - including the migration process and context and the perspective on Nigeria, and fourthly gender relations – especially as expressed in singlehood, marriage and the nuclear family. The interviews in Nigeria were geared towards the same topics, though their perspective on London tended to be more revealing about images and networks than about actual everyday life. I hardly ever covered all of these areas in one interview, but did follow up interviews in several cases.

All of the interviews in Nigeria and thirty-five out of the fifty-four in London were voice recorded and transcribed later. However I was acutely aware that an “interview as interactive event” (Witte 2008: 33) encompasses more than the spoken words and thus straight after the interviews I also took notes about the interview situation, the intonation and body language of my interview partner, my own emotions and what had happened and had been said off the record before and after the interview as well as any other impressions and thoughts I had.

Equally important to interviewing was participant observation. I ‘hung out’ with people, in shops or while walking in the street, taking the bus etc. The most intense situations were when I used participant observation during church services and other church events, including weddings, parties, conferences and meetings of several different church groups. In a Pentecostal environment, where belief is largely lived and experienced in the body, adopting a *somatic methodology* as “a way of acquiring social and practical skills without any a priori assumptions about their significance or function” (Jackson 1983: 339) was particularly important. Many ethnographers have commented on the inherent contradiction in participant observation between ‘participation’ and ‘observation,’ that needs to be balanced in the fieldwork situation (e.g. Cornwall 1996: 16-17). In some ways the ethnographer is engaged in the same project as the people whom are studied - in my case the practice of Pentecostalism.

Though perhaps with a different aim in mind, participation means to invest one's *embodied* personality and identity and opens the research to experience on more than just a cognitive level. Balancing participation and observation in church services for me often meant that I listened to the speaker as well as to the audience; I watched the speaker, audience and often a projection screen; I felt tension rising and falling in the room, producing goose-bumps on my skin and tears in my eyes; I wrote frantically into my diary, but at the same time stood up like the others around me, raised my hands, swayed and danced, sang songs, answered questions of the preacher, closed and opened my eyes or grabbed the hands of my neighbours to pray for them. The intensity that comes with the "sensuousness of doing fieldwork" (Witte 2008: 28) often made me feel overwhelmed – perhaps as an embodied form of the tension between participation and observation.

The evaluation of my material included a multilayered process of distancing. I transcribed my interviews and some sermons. I developed a thematic index and cross-referenced interviews and field notes. I found underlying themes and common tendencies and juxtaposed them with particularities that posed seeming contradictions. Through reading literature that seemed theoretically and/or thematically relevant, I 'encircled' what would become the red thread of my argument in the thesis.

It was difficult to gain direct insight into problematic relationships. Conflicts and gossip in the Tower of God congregation and their members' private lives were usually downplayed or expressed in indirect terms without mentioning names. This was also true for marital conflicts. However, there is an extensive Pentecostal discourse around marriage and when my interlocutors talked about the joys as well as the devil's potential attacks they sometimes used their own 'testimonies' as illustration. The focus on marriage and family also meant that women in particular were comfortable talking to me. Cooper notes that "marriage is a fundamental principle organizing productive and reproductive arrangement and a key element in (...) cultural and social life" (1997: xvii). Despite its 'neutral' connotation, marriage is anthropologically a 'safe but fertile field' (Cooper 1997: xxiii).

In this research and thesis I concentrate on the interleaving of religion and gendered relations. Other *intersectionalities* (Hill Collins 2000), such as age/generation, class/social status and legal status/race are mentioned at points in the thesis where they crucially contribute to the gender/religion focus. Age and generation should perhaps be much more included in the analysis of child rearing. For ethical reasons however, I have not conducted any interviews with children and minors and my material on their perspective relies on my observations, and some memories of second-generation adults.

Engagement versus Detachment

Autobiography, as the lived historical experience of those who seek to understand others, not only conditions that understanding but is in itself productive of the means by which an understanding can be sought. This urges an approach to research that starts from and returns to self-understanding as an integral part of trying to reach into the world of others (Cornwall 1996: 15).

My interest in the research topic was academic and political. However, it is also closely linked with my personal history. The ‘turn’ to *reflexivity* in anthropology since the 1970s was inspired by postcolonial and feminist theory. It created the space, in fact the necessity, to reveal relevant elements about the ethnographer’s partiality.

My own trajectory of relations and movements has shaped my research subject and my relationships and interactions with the people I worked with. Sometimes it made a mutual understanding easier, sometimes I felt I had to protect myself and was less engaged than others might have been in my situation.

I am deeply concerned about racist continuities in Europe in general and around immigration matters in particular. Growing up in Germany with its Third Reich history enabled a particular kind of awareness for violence related to supremacy and the responsibility it calls forth: to neither hide behind feelings of guilt, nor to give into the temptation of downplaying, resisting or ignoring. My studies of anthropology and political science in Berlin and Accra, as well as my more personal experiences in West

and Southern Africa and of African-born people in Europe made me aware of the concrete impact that racist inequalities have on concrete people, their emotions, finances, opportunities, movements, relationships, lives. A general sensitivity for injustice stems perhaps most crucially from my experience of having a brother whose humanity and ‘worth’ is questioned by individual people and economical discourses on the basis of the ‘difference’ that is caused by his severe disability.

A second factor is my upbringing with strong conservative Pentecostal Christian values, advocating selfless sacrifice and compromise. Initially I experienced such values as positive, but later in my life, I became aware of the deep ambivalences of such a framework. As it is itself built on a judgemental good/bad basis, it creates powerful norms and is necessarily exclusive and – to me - oppressive. The depth of my early experience of (Pentecostal) religiosity coupled with a later awareness of its repressive potential feeds a suspicion towards liberal ideas that often portray religious people in a simplistic manner as intolerant and irrational. It also nurtures an interest in ‘conservative’ Christian power and gender relations and in developing a perspective that can *adequately* grasp its complexities.

Negotiating Positionalities

Katrin: (...) I was there [at Jesus House] for the ‘Nigeria Prays’ meeting, because I get your news [the parish’s online newsletter].

Pastor: Yes, ‘Nigeria Prays’. Really?

Katrin: I think I was the only white person.

Pastor: Really?

Katrin: When we went out, a lady behind me joked and asked me: ‘So are you Nigerian as well?’

Pastor: (laughs)

Katrin: I said: ‘not yet’. (both laughing)

Pastor: Maybe you’ll be married to a Nigerian one day?

Katrin: Yes. Maybe. Who knows?³⁸

Research always involves processes of placing each other in interactions; it happens in “a field of (...) relational identities which never manage to constitute themselves fully, since relations do not form a closed system” (Cornwall 1996: 13). In the ‘Nigeria Prays’ meeting above, I as well as the lady situate me on a combined racial and national basis. The RCCG UK pastor points out a way to overcome the racial gap (marrying), but simultaneously cements my unmarried gender status.

My own position in the research field was to some degree influenced by the experience of being a migratory Londoner myself – even though in a very different legal, social and financial position than most of my interlocutors. In the early stages of my fieldwork I relied on practical information given to me by research participants, while later we exchanged information about the job market and transport system and opinions about the cleanliness of the roads or housing conditions.

My childhood Pentecostal experience made me feel simultaneously ‘similar’ and ‘different’ towards my research participants. This created some tension in how I presented myself when asked the frequent question: “Are you a Christian?” I felt similar enough to say that I was. I feel obliged to honour moral values that are strongly influenced by Christian ethics, I have experience with Christian faith and spirituality beyond a theoretical and scholarly level and I have some knowledge of doctrines and the Bible (even though not anywhere near the depth of many of my informants’). As I did not want my life to be Jesus’, I never said I was born-again. Usually I then explained about my mixed Lutheran and Pentecostal upbringing and my history of academic research into Pentecostalism since 2005. On the occasions where I was interrogated further, I was seen as a ‘doubting Thomas’ or a ‘backslider’. These are both ascriptions that imply the need for change. Because I did not agree that there was something ‘wrong’ with my rejection/indecisiveness, I counterbalanced such questionings by emphasising the professional nature of my presence. I dressed smartly

³⁸ Interview with the senior pastor of one of the bigger RCCG parishes in Southeast London, 02-10-2008.

and sometimes ‘hid’ behind my diary or camera. Later in the research such questions ceased as people just assumed that I must be Christian, having seen me participating in church.

Being female was neither a particular obstacle nor a benefit, but it did definitely influence the way I was positioned. It allowed me to do research with both men and women, whereas male researchers can find it sometimes difficult to engage with women (e.g. Doubleday 2008). Even more often than whether I was Christian, people asked about my marital status. I told them I was ‘single’, or, more precisely, not married, not engaged and had no plans to be either. I met Iris in the RCCG congregation Tower of God where I did the bulk of my fieldwork. We are of similar age. Despite being Igbo, she grew up in Lagos with her parents and twin sister. She had a good job with the electricity supply company NEPA and was financially well-off. She never had plans to leave Nigeria, but shortly before their wedding day, her fiancé Tayo was granted the UK visa he had applied for. He left a couple of weeks after they got married and she followed him soon after for the benefit of the relationship. At the time of our interview, they had a small daughter and Iris was expecting their second child. Despite her having to leave all her loved ones behind, she still considered herself lucky and happy to be married. When she found out about the ‘lack’ of a (potential) spouse in my life she comforted me: “Don’t worry! We love you very much!”³⁹ She offered to look around for a man, if I ‘didn’t mind’ getting married to a Nigerian. Even without her help, my status as a single woman of ‘marriageable age’ led to unexpectedly deep insights into gender relations when one male single participant confessed his love for me and expressed the wish to get married. By that time I had got to know him fairly well through formal and informal interviews. Initially, I was clear that I did not feel the same, but then wavered for some weeks or so, interrogating yet again my own emotional and social desires for my future. In the end I rejected his offer of love and matrimony. He was continually respectful of my work and even in times of personal insecurity or emotional pain, he never withdrew from our communication. Talking to him made me learn much about the initiative and persistence young men may display towards a woman they want to marry, but also how vulnerable it can make them feel. I became aware of criteria like loyalty, honesty, humility and education, according to

³⁹ Notes on interview situation, 25-05-2009.

which he evaluated a potential spouse. Perhaps most importantly, I gained insights into the role of the communication with God in this process.

Gender, race, education and marital status, all contributed to the way people positioned me. Also very important were my journeys to West Africa and the knowledge about places, foods, conditions and everyday life I had. My German nationality was not always relevant. When it was, I had mixed reactions, depending on knowledge or experience. Some people knew about the racist violence of neo-Nazis, racist control practices by the German police, as well as a more general anti-immigrant conservative political atmosphere in the country. Others had a very positive picture about Germany as a very 'clean' country with 'fair' (even if pedantic) bureaucratic practices.

The level of education a PhD signifies usually increased people's willingness to sacrifice their time to give me an interview. (Afterwards interviewees sometimes commented that they had actually enjoyed talking about their experiences.) Academic education is widely valued as positive and people knew that I was dependent on their contribution. Doing a PhD meant that I must be determined and hardworking and people appreciated that I did not feel 'too good' to sweep the church auditorium after the Sunday services.

However, some factors also created a distance between me and the Tower of God members. My excessive note taking and erratic church attendance towards the end of my fieldwork - in short my sometimes self-protective, sometimes necessary professionalism - highlighted that I was not and did not intend to be a 'normal' RCCG member. On a more personal level, I had very friendly relationships. But I did not participate in the exchanges of gifts, services and money that seem to mark a lasting friendship.

I think my interviewees generally trusted me, but they also made conscious decisions about what they told me and what they did not. Before each interview I told them how I was going to use the material and that I was happy to not mention certain details, would stop at any time and would allow them to withdraw retrospectively. I preferred to trust

my interlocutor's judgement especially concerning issues of emotional trauma and their legal status in the UK, even though I was risking gaps in my material.

Between Participation and Conversion

Anthropological knowledge is produced by both researcher and participants in a “mutual participation in the game of foregrounding some interpretations and backgrounding others” (Coleman forthcoming). In the following section I hope to make the concept of Pentecostal *conversion* fruitful - as a metaphor and beyond - to grasp some of the intertwinements between researcher, research subjects, religion and anthropology. Starting with the encounter of religion and anthropology I also hope to ease the reader into some of the ethnographic material.

In the first chapter of his book about the *Globalisation of Charismatic Christianity*, Coleman describes how he was ‘converted to the Anthropology of Christianity’ as an undergraduate student (2000: 17-18). I, to the contrary, went through more than five years of studying anthropology avoiding ‘religion’ as much as I could. Religion was something which I knew on an experiential level when I grew up. But I had rejected ‘believing’ (I had decided to ‘un-convert’ from religion so to speak) and did not desire to learn more on other levels. However, during the research for my M.A. on well-being among Ghanaians in Berlin from January 2005, I could not but notice the strong links between healthcare practices and Pentecostal Christianity. It dawned on me that I could no longer ignore the importance of the anthropology of Christianity for my work on the West African diaspora in Europe (Maier 2006, see also Krause 2003, 2011). Different from Coleman’s powerful first-time ‘encounter’ with Pentecostalism in a service, my own conversion process to the anthropology of Christianity was more like a gradual surrender, a lengthy back and forth between resistance and giving in. Eventually, I spent most Sundays in church, armed with notebook, voice recorder and camera in my bag and was hooked enough to do a PhD on yet more Pentecostalism.

On the level of my surrender to anthropology of Pentecostalism, conversion operates more like a metaphor. But if we look at a level of practices (what people *do*), it is

intriguing how little scientific research and Pentecostal conversion differ. Susan Harding shows in her article that “the membrane between disbelief [of e.g. the researcher] and belief is much thinner than we think” (1987: 178).

Pentecostals’ ‘conversion talk’ was often crucial in research encounters. I found out more about my participants’ beliefs by listening, while my counterparts furthered their religious endeavour of continuously transforming themselves into more serious Pentecostals by refining their testimonials and trying to ‘save’ souls – including my soul as it happened. Witnessing – telling someone else about one’s beliefs and transformations – is an *act of faith* (Marshall 2009: 146), central to Pentecostal practice and directed towards oneself, as much as toward the listener. As the asking and listening opposite, I was a tool in the conversion practice of the person I was listening to; their witnessing to me was part of their conversion experience that became (once more) manifest in and through the narration.

But in the research encounter, both I as researcher and my counterparts not only became more deeply enmeshed with our own aims and realities. We also took on the other’s reading of the situation. To a certain (and possibly very limited) extent, my interlocutors were converted to a perspective of the anthropology of Christianity. I asked questions about issues that specifically relate to anthropological discourses e.g. around the construction of authority, bodily practices, gender and so on, and thus probed interviewees to embark on an anthropological re-examination of their life experience and issues that they had taken to be ‘natural’. One pastor’s wife told the congregation from the pulpit that she appreciated my presence as a researcher because she believed that the church could learn something from an observant ‘outside’ perspective on Pentecostal life.⁴⁰

More prominent in research interactions was the way I was drawn into a process of conversion to Pentecostalism. Many of my interlocutors insisted that the Pentecostal, not the anthropological perspective on the fieldwork situation (as on life generally) was the more relevant one. What I experienced as ‘doing fieldwork’, Pentecostal onlookers sometimes interpreted as ‘doing conversion’. I did things that many of my interviewees

⁴⁰ Fieldnotes, 09-11-2008.

recognised as part of their born-again experience: I screened the landscape of relevant churches and settled for one. I attended regularly and later became more involved. New converts in the RCCG are encouraged to listen, read, take notes and imitate others' body gestures. Like them, I was regularly practising and learning more about Pentecostalism and seemed to be somewhere on my way to the transformation of my thinking and bodily practices.

Marleen de Witte states that in her research among Pentecostals in Ghana, the categories of 'believer' and 'unbeliever' are 'mutually exclusive' (2008: 30). I found that this was only the case on a doctrinal level. On a practical level, it was far from clear whether I was a 'real' believer or 'just' a participant observer. Being seen as a convert is a big part in becoming a convert and social identification can precede the adoption of distinctive beliefs. Peel emphasises this role of social recognition in the process of conversion: he sees it as a "process by which people come to regard themselves, and be regarded by others, as Christians" (2000: 216).

But beyond a passive being 'seen' as Christian, I did *actually* find myself being transformed. The techniques of learning in both disciplines – anthropology and Pentecostalism – are similar. Both demand the practitioner to allow something new and unexpected into one's life and experience this with their mind and senses. In her article, Susan Harding examines how witnessing talk transforms the teller, but simultaneously also the listener – whether convert or anthropologist: "Witnessing and conversion talk more generally (...) is rhetorical in the sense that it is an *argument* about the transformation of self that lost souls must undergo, and a *method* of bringing about that change in those who listen to it" (Harding 1987: 167, emphasis in original). In the course of the fieldwork, I found that my world was increasingly Pentecostalised: I felt guilty when I had not been to church, examined my everyday life in Pentecostal and biblical terms and evaluated potential divine 'signs'.

Such a gradual change reflects many of the conversion narratives of the RCCG members that I collected during my research. Some of my informants identified a one-off 'encounter with God' during their time at University or during one of the many

Pentecostal conferences as the point when they ‘turned around’.⁴¹ Nevertheless, it emerges from their accounts that a conversion *process* follows the initial event and lasts until one’s death (or Judgement Day for that matter). In ideal terms such a conversion process is an ongoing, steady, linear movement closer to God, a ‘ladder’⁴² to heaven. In reality, it is a lengthy and difficult process towards a total transformation of one’s lifestyle, often involving doubts, ‘backsliding’ and ‘re-dedication’ (see Illustration 2).

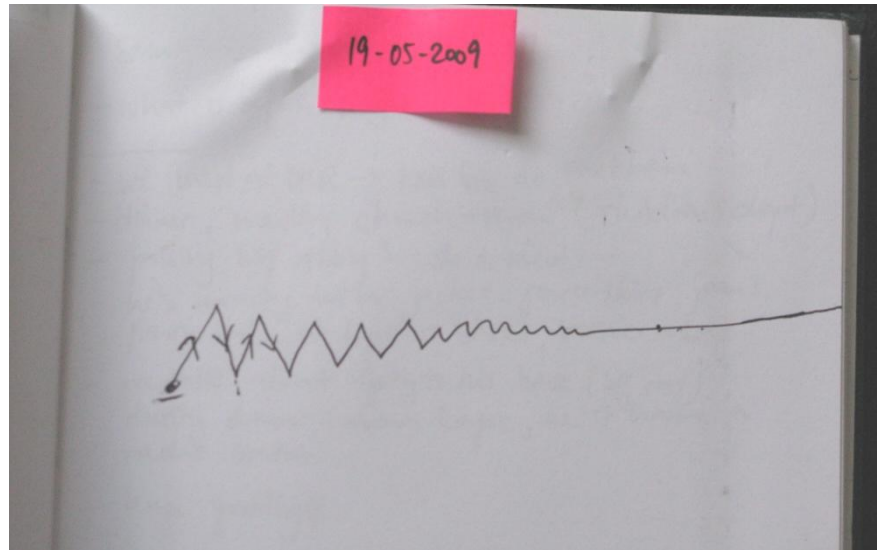


Illustration 2: Spiritual development

after deciding to become born-again. Drawn by Danny during interview.

Oluwa is a member of RCCG Jesus House in Northeast London. At the time of our interview, she is also employed by the church as a legal advisor. She grew up in a well-to-do Yoruba family of dedicated mainline protestant Christians in Lagos. She became born-again at school, when she was only eleven years old, but soon after, her faith went through some rough patches.

However, when I turned eighteen, I decided it was too hard, I decided I don’t want to do this anymore. So I kind of just walked away from the born-again thing and just kind of had fun (...) I kind of just got tired of people telling me what to do, telling me ‘don’t listen to this music’. ‘Why shouldn’t I listen to this

⁴¹ Interestingly, virtually all of my interviewees had become born-again in Nigeria.

⁴² Tayo in a joint interview with his wife Iris, 25-07-2009.

music?’ Nobody said anything. It wasn’t working. Now it was when I, became born-again *again* that I ...what then happened is that they started to teach the principles and I understood it.⁴³

Much like anthropologists, they engage in a constant conscious scrutiny of their own practices, social contacts and material environment.⁴⁴ On this evaluation they base their perception of the present (to recognise divine signs and miracles as such) and future decisions (to do the right thing and associate with the right people). Oluwa notices deep changes in her life: she is more confident and loves other people much more than she used to. She feels that her trust in the relationship with God guided her to marry her husband. She acknowledges that at the time she could not have known for certain whether he was the man God wanted her to marry, but retrospectively she sees as a proof that after “seven and a half years [of marriage] it’s better than when we first got married, so it must have been God.”!

(Re-)Presenting Realities

Though I did notice changes in my own life, I wish to add that however closely related there are also crucial differences between anthropological and Pentecostal practice. The benefits I got from studying Pentecostalism are more tangible and predictable (regular pay through my research grant and advantages in the labour market after having completed the doctorate). I could decide to leave a Pentecostal perspective because at a cognitive level, I had less dedication and ‘belief’ than my interlocutors. My aim was never to ‘surrender’ completely and in this sense, my *experience* of Pentecostalism, and thus my ability to represent it adequately is very limited.

I represent my material to an academic audience. My engagement with social scientist debates about Pentecostalism, gender and migration creates a distance in relation to how the RCCG members I worked with would choose to represent themselves. It is difficult

⁴³ Interview, 23-11-2008.

⁴⁴ Note that the reflexive turn in anthropology happened in the 1980s, at the same time as the rise of Pentecostalism with its self-reflexive practice.

to say exactly how theory and empirical material have shaped each other in the process of analysis in my head. Practice, embodiment and performativity approaches seemed the adequate way to look at my material and grasp the Pentecostal interwoven-ness of doctrine with behaviour, of the social with the individual and of language with the material and the body.⁴⁵ I hope that a focus on practices, as well as on individual experiences and journeys have made it possible to strike a reasonable balance to allow generalisations while still doing justice to particularities.

Conclusion

If the following thesis is a re-enactment of Pentecostal practice, this chapter aimed to build the auditorium by introducing the reader to the research trajectory, methods used and my positionality as researcher. Drawing on the concept of conversion, it has furthermore given insights into dynamics in research encounters. The next chapter sets the scene by zooming into the practices of some RCCG parishes and their members in London, but also portrays their situated-ness in the wider context of the city's Nigerian Pentecostal communities.

⁴⁵ The *performative power* of words can make things happen that are not yet - the central *technique* of a Pentecostal *regime of practice* (Marshall 2009: 128ff).

Chapter Three

Pentecostal London Lives

It is about nine am on a Sunday morning and I am on the way to the Sunday Service at RCCG Tower of God. There is little traffic on the roads, but the bus from Peckham to Tower of God on the Old Kent Road is packed. Most passengers are well-dressed black men, woman and children, some holding Bibles. One passenger jokes that the Bus 78 that takes us to the churches on the Old Kent Road has become a 'church bus'. "How are you, my sister? You are welcome!" say the members of the ushers' team who stand in the reception area of the church in colour-coordinated clothing to greet the congregation and guard the building at the same time. When there is no service, the doors are locked and protected by a CCTV camera system. We enter from the bright morning sun into the church building and walk towards a large framed photograph of the RCCG's General Overseer Adeboye and his wife in traditional Yoruba gear. At the bottom of the stairs that lead to the main auditorium, children run around, men greet each other and chat while they take off their coats and put prams in a corner, women change into high heels, re-tie their headgear or check their make-up. Many know each other well. They are regular attendants or volunteer 'church workers' and spend a lot of their time on the premises together before, in and after services and other church meetings. Some are relatives, friends, clients or business partners and see each other in other contexts, too. Through the buzz of cheerful voices we can hear music now. The praise session kicks off the first service of the day. The adults make their way to the first floor while the children go to their respective Sunday School classes on the second floor. The ministers and choir members sit together in groups in designated rows. The 'nursing mothers' occupy the back rows to be able to leave the room without much difficulty. All others are asked to accept the place the ushers guide them to. They make

sure that the front rows are occupied first. This ensures that the video recordings can create the impression of a full church, by showing as few empty seats as possible. The first forty minutes or so are spent with 'praise and worship' and the opening prayers. The congregation stands in front of their chairs. The music is building up an emotional atmosphere, geared towards making the 'presence of the Holy Spirit' increasingly felt in the room as well as in people's bodies. The tunes, rhythms and lyrics accompany the believers' clapping, dancing, raising of arms and hands, bowing and lifting of heads, kneeling down. At first during 'praise' at a faster pace, people's faces are cheerfully smiling, while they make God 'dance offerings'. Then during the slower 'worship', facial expressions become more serious, eyes closed, sometimes with tears running down (mostly women's) cheeks. Now, in a quieter atmosphere, the audience's bodies move more slowly, sway, open up arms and chests towards the ceiling or bend over slightly in an inward-looking gesture. When the singing stops, there is a short interruption during which a minister comes to the pulpit to give the opening prayer, usually involving a few 'prayer points': the minister suggests short prayers containing only a few words, such as "Thank you Lord, because low self esteem, has been crucified with you".⁴⁶ Then, for a minute or two, the members of the congregation repeat this line in slight variations such as 'My father I praise you because all my problems, my self-esteem and my financial troubles have been crucified with you'. Some people speak in 'tongues'. Despite using their own words, and praying at their individual pace, with individual movements, rhythms and degrees of concentration, all are starting and stopping at the same moment, which creates a sense of 'togetherness' that makes these 'prayer points' as much a common as an individual prayer. The degree to which people feel 'filled' by the Holy Spirit seems to be linked to (or echoed by?) the flow of the music, as well as the voice and gestures of the minister – all amplified through the sound system and magnified through the flat screens that show the live video recording of the praying minister. Listening to 'the Word', the sermon, is as much part of the weekly dose of 'being charged' as the singing and praying, but involves a different relationship between the minister and his/her audience. Whereas the prayers are taken in turns by different ministers, it is always the senior pastor who delivers the sermon if he is around. Though the congregation participates by finding and reading Bible verses and responds to rhetorical questions in a formulaic way, it is a much more vertical

⁴⁶ Fieldnotes 29-03-2009.

relationship: the congregation is taught by the pastor who is perceived to have superior spiritual knowledge. After the service at around two pm, most people leave fairly soon to cook and eat a late lunch at home and spend the evening with their family or visit friends. Other people stay on to clean the auditorium, design next week's church bulletin, finish the audio/video recording of the service for sale, attend the meeting of one or the other church group, or spend time with their friends. Others seek the pastor's advice and prayers face-to-face in his office on the third floor. He is directly ordained by the General Overseer and not only represents the church as an institution, he is also a 'man of God' with a confirmed, divine calling. He is always greeted in a respectful Yoruba manner by bowing down or courtesy. He is referred to as 'Pastor' or 'Daddy'. This reflects his leadership position as the 'head' of the 'church family', and indicates his responsibility for the well-being of the congregation, but also commands the obedience of his children 'in the Lord'.

This condensed narrative of a typical Sunday in the RCCG congregation Tower of God in Southeast London shows that individualised embodied practices and being taught in a hierarchical setting are the two pillars of Pentecostal learning and being spiritually 'charged'. It also shows that the church as a spiritual institution overlaps with social dynamics. The situation in the bus indicates that the RCCG is embedded in a landscape of Nigerian African Pentecostal churches in the city. In the following, I will briefly introduce this landscape, and then zoom into the organisation of the RCCG and its modes of boundary-construction. The latter is marked by a fundamental ambivalence between a moral distinction towards 'un-believers' and the ideal of inclusion through conversion of everyone. Practices that aim at the all-encompassing Pentecostalisation of RCCG members' lives bridge this tension between an 'inside' and an 'outside'; however, they also reproduce a rift between encapsulation and openness that requires constant negotiation.

Nigerian Pentecostals in London

Some of the - mostly Yoruba - London-based Nigerians are Muslims, but the majority are Christians. They belong to the Church of England, the Catholic Church and African

Initiated *Aladura* churches (Harris 2006, see also Peel 1968). Many, though, are Pentecostal Christians and attend one of the numerous churches in London's Southeast.⁴⁷ There are other influential Pentecostal churches in London,⁴⁸ but if we look at numbers of parishes and membership, Nigerian-initiated and -led churches are particularly successful in the city. They range from mega-churches like Kingsway International Christian Church (KICC)⁴⁹ to numerous smaller churches with one or a few branches, tiny house churches and prayer groups. Some are founded by Nigerian-born pastors in the UK. Others are part of a larger network with a mother church in Nigeria.⁵⁰

Among the latter is the Redeemed Christian Church of God (RCCG). Many of the RCCG premises in London are highly visible owing to their policy of 'covering territory' with many smaller branches. The RCCG expanded in Nigeria and subsequently worldwide from the 1990s. In Nigeria, the RCCG is a major political and social player. The Church's general overseer Pastor Adeboye was voted among the fifty most influential men in the world by *Newsweek* Magazine in 2009 (Miller 2009), and their monthly night vigils in their prayer ground near Lagos attract up to a million of participants and spectators.

In the UK this positive reputation continually attracts new members. Ukah notes that in 2004 the RCCG UK had a total membership of 45,377. The number of UK parishes grew from 181 in 2004 to 241 in 2007 – with 146 in London alone (Ukah 2009: 104 and 129, footnote 21).⁵¹ Though in Nigeria the RCCG's headquarters and highest concentration is still in the Lagos area, it had over 6,000 parishes worldwide in 2002 (Ukah 2005a) and most likely has many more today. In Southeast London, the RCCG

⁴⁷ The provisional list of Lewisham's 'Faith and Social Action Officer' consisted of about 320 churches in the London borough. Interview, 05-09-2008. On the Old Kent Road in the borough of Southwark, I counted fourteen churches. The majority of these are Nigerian led. Additionally, just off the Old Kent Road is an industrial estate that hosts several churches. Fieldnotes, August 2008 and update 2010.

⁴⁸ E.g. the European-initiated Hillsong Church in Central London (www.hillsong.co.uk [accessed 12-09-2011]) and the Brazilian-initiated Universal Church of the Kingdom of God (www.uckg.org.uk [accessed 12-09-2011]).

⁴⁹ www.kicc.org.uk [accessed 12-09-2011].

⁵⁰ For example Christ Apostolic Church (CAC), Winners' Chapel, Christ Embassy and Deeper Life.

⁵¹ The RCCG's annual report of 2008 counts a much smaller total of 184 parishes in UK and Ireland, but some parishes may have failed to report to the international bureau in Lagos in time to be included in the report. The numbers of members vary significantly between a few dozens and several hundred and occasionally even thousands.

has almost met the task of its mission statement to plant churches in developing countries within a maximum of five minutes' walking distance and in developed countries within five minutes driving distance of each other.

The leaders, members and visitors of the RCCG consist almost exclusively of people who were born to Nigerian parents, have spent their formative years in Nigeria⁵² and reside in the UK for a varying amount of time. Furthermore, there is strong evidence that the RCCG parishes⁵³ are dominated by Nigerians of Yoruba descent. An explanation may be the historical and numerical significance of Nigerian Yorubas in the UK⁵⁴ since the 1970s and especially since the 1990s. This has led to an extensive Yoruba infrastructure in London beyond the churches (Oyetade 1993). In busses and streets in Peckham in Southeast London for example, one can often hear as much Yoruba as English being spoken.⁵⁵

RCCG parishes in London collaborate with other Nigerian Pentecostal churches in the city. But however similar they are, the RCCG (both, in London and in Nigeria) stands out with its doctrinal emphasis on a holy lifestyle and the performance of miracles. Winners' Chapel, another major Nigerian Pentecostal church, seems to specialise more in material wealth production. The Pentecostal 'Mountain of Fire and Miracles Ministry' occupies the niche of removing obstacles to success by deliverance and prayer (see also Ukah 2004: 424-426). In Nigeria, the RCCG and its leaders are major political players. This is not (yet) the case in the UK but the aim to produce 'good' citizens and to be transparent as an institution is evident in collaborations with councils concerning rubbish recycling campaigns, invitations to NHS health advisors or parish initiatives to promote participation in elections.

⁵² Some were born in the UK before their parents went back to Nigeria, mostly in the 1970s. They are socialised in Nigeria but British citizens.

⁵³ 'Parish' in the RCCG refers to a congregation of people and an administrative unit, not to a clearly defined geographical unit as in, say, the Church of England. The geographical location of a parish can change.

⁵⁴ See Harris (2006: 3, 209-213) and Buchi Emecheta's novel *Second Class Citizen* for historical accounts.

⁵⁵ Yoruba Nigerians do not necessarily stay exclusively in these structures – in fact, fellow Nigerian business people and landlords are often viewed with suspicion. However, this infrastructure potentially allows for a high degree of encapsulation. Socio-economic dynamics within this wider infrastructure will be discussed in Chapter Eight in more detail.

Despite the Nigerian dominance, leadership and members often reject being labelled as a 'Nigerian' church. They emphasise the church's membership in a larger multi-national/racial/cultural 'body of Christ'. Beyond the theological argument of unity, there are also internal stratifications (such as class, education or political outlook) at work which make a 'Nigerian' label questionable from a social scientist point of view. Jesus House is explicitly 'progressive' in religious practice and in the ways in which it supports e.g. single parents.⁵⁶ These views overlap with a tendency in Jesus House to attract people from particularly wealthy and/or educated upper middle class backgrounds. Smaller branches in the Southeast of London seemed to cater more for people with more conservative attitudes and those from middle or lower middle class backgrounds. Note, though, that this is a complex and variable issue if we consider for example loss of status through migration and the failure of the British labour market to recognise professional qualifications.⁵⁷ The internal socio-economic differences between pastors and branches seem to coincide with a difference in their preoccupation with demons and witchcraft. In Jesus House services and the house fellowship I attended, it was very much the personal relationship with Jesus that was concentrated on. In some parishes on the Old Kent Road, sermons and prayers focussed more on exploring and warding off evil forces.⁵⁸ Members of different branches often stated that they had chosen the parish according to whether they agreed with the pastor's particular teachings. Perhaps this is another reason for the success of the RCCG: the high number of parishes allows for everyone to find a place of worship that suits their particular wishes without having to leave the RCCG organisation.

⁵⁶ 'Progressive' is a term that Jesus House members often used themselves. In interviews members of staff emphasised that this liberal attitude did not mean they were less serious about following the Bible.

⁵⁷ This distinction describes a trend that I have noticed. Further research is necessary to verify it. With the term 'middle class' I refer to the socio-economical status they had in Nigeria. However, being wealthy in Nigeria is often vital for gaining education and socio-economic status in the UK.

⁵⁸ Generally however, the RCCG seems to be less occupied with fighting witchcraft and demonic action than other Nigerian-dominated churches in London, e.g. the Aladura church Cherubim and Seraphim that Harris describes (2006).

RCCG Tower of God

RCCG Tower of God parish is located on the Old Kent Road, a busy thoroughfare that links Central London with the Southeast. Tower of God was among the first of the now many RCCG parishes planted in the UK in the early 1990s. It is formally embedded in the administrative and doctrinal structure of the RCCG worldwide. This structure links parishes in all countries with each other and the Church's centre in Southeast Nigeria. Local parishes like Tower of God are led by a parish pastor, but are simultaneously part of an 'Area' under an 'Area Pastor'. Several Areas form a 'Zone' under a 'Zonal Pastor'. Around one hundred parishes or three to seven Zones constitute a 'Province' under a 'Provincial Pastor'. Several Provinces form a 'Region'. The majority of parishes are located in Nigeria. Parishes abroad are co-ordinated by the International Office in the RCCG's Redemption Camp just outside Lagos. The RCCG in the UK forms one unit, guided by their own 'Executive Council' that consists of three London-based pastors. At the top of the RCCG hierarchy and in charge of decision-making that concerns all parishes worldwide is the General Overseer Adeboye with his wife (the so-called 'Mother-in-Israel'), the twelve 'Assistant General Overseers' who form the 'Governing Council' as well as the so-called 'Elders'.⁵⁹ Local parishes are furthermore connected through their own networks that they form by repeatedly planting daughter parishes (which may belong to a different Area or Zone). Like all recognised RCCG parishes, Tower of God's parish pastor sends financial and congregation development reports via the UK headquarters to Nigeria and uses teaching material and messages that are approved by the General Overseer Pastor Enoch Adejare Adeboye and his assistants. The RCCG pastors in the UK meet regularly for the purposes of information exchange and organisational matters.

RCCG Tower of God parish was initiated by today's head pastor Philemon Olawale and a few founding members in 1995. Since then Tower of God has grown to a few hundred members and facilitated the start of several daughter parishes. At the time of my research, Pastor Olawale oversaw several parishes and was invited to speak in the UK,

⁵⁹ Interview with Provincial Pastor in Lagos, and Assistant General Overseer, 12-01-2009. See also Ukah (2008: 89-107).

Greece, Germany, Nigeria, USA and Pakistan.⁶⁰ From the start, he was strongly supported by his wife Mercy, who is also an ordained pastor. Both were born to Nigerian parents and spent their formative years in Nigeria. Mercy Olawale, however, was born in Britain and her British citizenship facilitated their coming to London around twenty-five years ago, originally to look for work. Both Christians, they joined an RCCG parish in London, before planting Tower of God. They held their activities in different locations before the purchase of the current building.

Similar to many other RCCG parishes, most of the people that attend the services and/or are more deeply involved in the activities of Tower of God are aged between twenty-five and fifty (see also Hunt and Lightley 2001, Hunt 2002, Ukah 2009). There are unmarried singles and some older people, too, but the majority are married couples with young children. As is common in many Pentecostal churches all over the world, there are more women members; however men are more than just an insignificant minority and are often active in a church group. The social background of most attendants can be described as 'aspiring middle class'. Most people I have spoken to in different parishes come from Nigerian middle class urban backgrounds (often Lagos) and have some kind of post-secondary education, often a university degree. Most were 'born-again' in Christ before they came to Europe and were exposed to Pentecostal religious practice in one or several Pentecostal churches in Nigeria. The intensity of their religious engagement varied individually and over time and often changed (intensified or declined) shortly after their coming to Europe.

Though most members of Tower of God spent their formative years in Nigeria, their physical journeys, time of residence in the UK and their legal statuses vary.⁶¹ Both men and women usually work, even if they are full time students or have small children. Most are in low paid jobs such as cleaners, kitchen help, nurse, carer, nursery teacher, security guard and post office worker. Some of the married men of Tower of God, have secured steady jobs as medical doctors or lawyers. However, many – unmarried as well as married, some with children – often still struggle with residence papers and the obtaining of professional qualifications, both of which are essential requirements for

⁶⁰ The parish was in the process of establishing a daughter parish in Lahore at the time of my research.

⁶¹ Tower of God member Femi reckoned that up to two thirds of the members and visitors may reside in the UK without a regularised stay permit in the UK. Interview, 05-05-2009.

well-paid employment. In the face of the dire situation of the labour market, many seek to establish a business parallel to other professional efforts. Most Tower of God members live nearby, within walking distance or a short bus ride away. Often, they live in sub-let council flats in tower blocks of fairly deprived areas of Southeast London. All but one of the members I visited (singles, couples and families) shared a flat with non-family members and sometimes lived under crowded conditions. When they lived in Nigeria, they often had a stable income, rented a flat for themselves or lived in a generous family house or compound, sometimes with driver and maids. Young mothers in particular find it difficult to adjust to the conditions in London.

Compared with Tower of God, the people I met in RCCG Jesus House had often completed their higher education in the UK. As a result, they held higher qualifications and better paid jobs in London. They tended to distinguish themselves from Nigerians in the deprived areas of Southeast London whom they described as recent arrivals⁶² and belonging to a different class.

Tower of God owns the three-storey building they occupy. It underwent refurbishment in 2009 partly in order to incorporate a crèche on the ground floor. Several millions to pay back the loan are provided entirely by the congregation.⁶³ After passing the reception desk - a feature in many newly refurbished RCCG parishes that one may associate with a hotel or conference centre and white collar success - and climbing the stairs, one enters the main auditorium on the first floor. It seats approximately 180 people on red chairs arranged in perfectly straight rows (see Illustration 3). The chairs face the see-through pulpit on the podium, which has four standing microphones. The pulpit shows the green circle and the white dove of the RCCG logo worldwide, as well as the name of the local parish. The podium is decorated with bouquets of artificial flowers against a backdrop of a wall that is covered with occasionally changing cloth decorations and holds a large TV flat screen. To the sides of the podium are separate seats for the ministers and the worship team's musical instruments. The other walls are white and bare apart from the obligatory poster with the RCCG mission statement. The

⁶² Note, though, that it can take years and years of effort to obtain a stay and work permit. While this thesis was written, Danny from Tower of God had been in London for seven years and was still illegalised.

⁶³ However, RCCG UK parishes are often registered as charities and hence entitled to tax benefits.

media team operates sound and visual technology from a built-in box room with windows into the auditorium. Apart from church fliers, offering baskets, spare Bibles, a few tambourines and a carafe of anointing oil, the room is empty. Most other RCCG auditoriums look strikingly similar, varying only in size, shape of the room and perhaps the colour of chairs and carpet.⁶⁴ The second floor accommodates the brand new TV and music studio, which hosts the children's groups during Sunday service. On the third floor, visitors can wait for an audience with the pastor in the secretary's room. The offices of pastor Olawale and his wife are packed with desks, sofas, boxes and shelves full of papers, folders and books. As in other parishes I have been to, the publicly accessible parts of Tower of God's premises are usually spotlessly clean and tidy.



Illustration 3: Tidy rows of chairs
in RCCG auditorium in Southeast London.

⁶⁴ The new auditorium at Jesus House seats about 1,500 people. Fieldnotes, 27-03-2011.

Regular activities are similar in all RCCG parishes all over the world. They comprise the Sunday service, workers' meetings and Sunday School. Where church premises are too small to host the visitors, there may be several successive services. On the first Sunday of the month, only one, longer Thanksgiving Service is held. During the week, two services are held on Wednesday and Friday between seven and nine pm. Every first Friday of the month there is an All-Night-Vigil instead of the evening service. On two Friday nights per year, the parish activities are cancelled and the whole congregation participates in the Festival of Life (FoL) instead. The FoL is a smaller version of the Holy Ghost Service that is held monthly in the RCCG's prayer ground 'Redemption Camp' near Lagos. The FoL usually happens in the Excel exhibition halls in East London, has approximately 30,000 participants and features the Church's General Overseer Adeboye as a speaker. Beyond this regular schedule, all RCCG congregations have their own 'month of prayer and fasting', as well as church 'conferences'. Outside the premises of the church, Tower of God facilitates 'house fellowship' groups – again in line with global RCCG practice. Irregularly, according to demand, water baptisms (in a local swimming pool), child naming and dedication ceremonies and weddings are held, too. All RCCG parishes in London participate in the 'twenty-four-hour-prayer-chain for London'. This is a network of Pentecostal churches that each pray on one specific day for the welfare and peace in the city, its inhabitants, politicians and economy. The chain reaches Tower of God parish on the eighteenth day of every month.

Also part of global RCCG practice, but subject to more variation according to specific parish requirements, are the activities of the church 'departments'. All adults of the parish are sub-divided into groups according to gender and marital status – two of the most important features of a Pentecostal self, discussed in detail in later chapters. All married men, married women and (male and female) singles are supposed to meet once a month in their respective groups.⁶⁵ Church workers (or aspiring church workers) join one or several of these subgroups, depending on their availability and interests. Many workers spend at least three evenings and the whole of Sunday in the church premises. In Tower of God, as elsewhere, the church choir and music department are responsible for all the musical elements at all church events. The children's ministry organises the children's Sunday school. The Sunday School teachers prepare the weekly Bible study

⁶⁵ At Tower of God, the interest in the men's and women's meetings seems to be quite low.

sessions for the adults of the congregation. The media department is in charge of filming, the projection of song lyrics and amplifying technology. The maintenance and cleaning group hoovers and mops the church, cleans the toilets and arranges chairs. The intercessors are a prayer team that prays for the church and its members' spiritual well-being. Isaac, who is one of their members, describes them as 'the engine of the congregation.'⁶⁶ Tower of God also has a department for welfare, which follows members up who have been absent from church and supports needy members financially. The 'protocol department' picks guest preachers up and attends to them. There is also a business group, which consists of self-employed business men and women who meet on a monthly basis to exchange ideas and support each other over breakfast. One man is responsible for the little bookshop which is open in Sundays after the service. Among the more special features of Tower of God is its theatre group, which is sometimes invited to minister in other churches.

Some of these church departments in Tower of God, as well as in other RCCG parishes, are male- or female-dominated: only one man is part of the children's Sunday school ministry, for example. The choir members are mostly female, whereas all the musicians are male. In the 'work for God', we can also observe gender dynamics beyond a simple male-female ratio: the male members of the maintenance team told me that they did not mind hoovering and cleaning toilets in church, but would not automatically do these jobs at home.

Groups like the choir, cleaning department, theatre group and Sunday school teachers meet weekly in addition to the general church activities. Other departments such as media, children and evangelism meet according to need. The work carried out in the departments is often of a practical nature, but as 'work for God' it has a clear spiritual dimension and marks these often bodily activities and the time invested as sacrificial offerings and forms of worship.

⁶⁶ Interview, 26-09-2009.

Pentecostalism as Embodied Lifestyle

The members of the maintenance department meet every Sunday from five pm to tidy and clean the church for the following day. Many people arrive late, depending on their work and family commitments. While hoovering, dusting and mopping people have short personal conversations and jokes and laughter often sound through the staircase. The members work ‘for God’, but the group is also a social support network. This becomes especially clear in the ritual of the communal prayer at the end. The group stands in a circle and holds hands. Isaac, the leader usually initiates a few worship songs and the rest joins in. Then he raises a few prayer ‘points’ that are prayed by the group. They can be fairly general issues such as thanking God, praying for protection of the church, etc. As the department’s leader, he stays up to date with the personal worries of ‘his’ group members. Isaac sends out regular text messages with Bible verses to encourage the department volunteers and calls them when they have not shown up. Some members come to him for personal advice or prayers. During the closing prayer on Saturdays, he may ask the whole group to pray for a member who is pregnant, in hospital or looking for a place to stay. In the last part of the prayer, the members in the circle can raise their own issues. On one occasion, a female member asked us to pray for her baby. The baby had dropped on the floor just before coming to church and she was worried that it was hurt. Such prayers not only function as spiritual support, but also prompt the others to be on the lookout for a vacant room or help and show compassion in other ways.

This example shows that sub-groups like the workers’ departments are meant to meet people’s individual needs and foster family-like social relations among the members beyond formal church activities. It helps church members to live Pentecostalism as an all-encompassing lifestyle: to have Pentecostal friends (e.g. fellow church members), think Pentecostal thoughts (e.g. how to please God by volunteering in church or being compassionate with others) and have Pentecostal needs (e.g. prayer to calm a mother’s anxieties).

This must be learned and practiced in a process of dissolving boundaries between church and everyday activity that Csordas calls *ritualisation of life* (Csordas 1997:74, 100-130) – a *Pentecostalisation* of life, in this case. Coleman and Collins suggest that all “practices of collective and individual worship can become techniques of the body and embodied dispositions that cannot simply be shut off, once the believer leaves a service” (2000: 318). Sharp analytical distinctions between formal ritual action and everyday practice cannot always be sustained. Coleman and Collins mainly refer to a sense of sacralising the mundane outside the church. I emphasise that the blurring of the boundaries between sacred and mundane also works in the other direction: mundane issues can be sacralised by merely taking them into the church. In the maintenance department meeting on Saturdays, the sacred is taken out of the ritual context: prayer becomes a means of sharing concerns in a social act; conversely, removing dirt becomes an act of worship (even though effectively it is still only dirt that has been removed).

Practice and experience evident in [church] services are evident in everyday existence; the sacred blends with the mundane and vice versa. The sense of internal consistency is not merely a matter of conscious ideology or theology; it is about creating a *habitus*, in our wider sense of the term, which is always potentially the arena for inspired action, and which can be read inductively as signs of spiritual presence or at least of one’s identity as a believer. (Coleman and Collins 2000: 324-325, emphasis in original)

As part of what Coleman and Collins call ‘internal consistency’, Tower of God members learn to evaluate everyday incidences as divine ‘signs’ and spiritual ‘lessons’ or tests. Believers practice this in both meanings of the word: they *do* religious things (e.g. praying aloud) and do it *often* and repeatedly in church and non-church contexts to ‘create a habitus’.

The process of learning to experience God in and outside of church takes place on a bodily level, in a sensory way. This is true of Pentecostalism generally (for e.g. the USA see Luhmann 2007); later chapters will describe what bodies specifically do and experience in the Nigerian-Londoner version. Without looking at the body we cannot understand what people experience. The embodiment approach, which I have referred to earlier, sees the body not as an object, but as “the *subject* of culture” (Csordas 1990: 5,

emphasis in original). Such a grounding of religious practice in an “intelligent body inhabiting a meaningful world” (ibid.: 25) allows us to examine how RCCG members become part of the collective body of Christ simultaneously with becoming individual believers with their specific experience.

The believer’s body is where the power of God becomes manifest and is generated. Encounters with God that lead to conversion are felt in the body, often coupled with weeping or falling, while the presence of the Holy Spirit is manifest in the loosened jaws, vocal chords, tongue and lips during glossolalia. Labour-intensive bodily worship practices such as described in the opening vignette aim at accessing God’s capacities. For the maintenance department’s members, the body and its senses are a crucial vehicle in the process of Pentecostalisation of their lives, too: the mother feels calmer as we pray for her child and their body performs worship-work when cleaning the church.

In church, Pentecostal bodies are consciously managed in worship (Harris 2006: 232) and trained to be ‘open’ for the in-filling of the Holy Spirit. It involves movements of hands and arms, feet, neck and the whole believing body, the activation of breath and vocal chords, skin being touched, substance applied or taken in, the body being emptied of food and deprived of sleep - in prayers, anointing with oil, taking in the holy communion, laying on of hands, fasting or deliverance prayers. The more these practices are carried out in different contexts, the more they become embodied. It becomes part of the body’s capacity to endure hunger and thirst, to stay awake until late or get up at night, to pray using specific words, starting and stopping at specific times, with an audible voice, in a variety of postures and fast or slow body movements, to raise arms and hands in worship, to internalise and memorise scriptures and formulaic verbal responses that are used in services. Even Bible reading can be seen as a bodily practice, as it should be done regularly, often in the quiet early morning hours. These repeated actions are “practices, (...) and techniques through which certain sensibilities are awakened and developed in ritual by means of which the body is prepared to become a vessel of the Holy Spirit” (Rabelo et al. 2009: 2).⁶⁷

⁶⁷ The context of their study is urban Brazil. For Nigerian Pentecostalism, a particular illustration of Pentecostal training of bodies may be the ‘Do-it-Yourself’ deliverance strategy in eight phases that Adogame describes for ‘Mountain of Fire and Miracles Ministry’ (MFM), a church which we also find in the UK (Adogame 2005a).

Bodily practices do not always have to be particularly big or loud to have a spiritual impact. During the sermons in different RCCG parishes I saw many neutral or even bored looking faces around me. At first this surprised me considering the passion with which these same people talked to me about the Bible after the service. However, there seems to be a perception in the RCCG that the mere act of being physically present in church - having travelled to church, sitting, staying awake, listening, having a note pad resting on one's lap - can cause spiritual transformation.

Even less tangible, the presence of biblical scriptures and words that are in line with the Bible possesses an agency that goes way beyond that of a signifier. Like bodily practices, speech acts *do* something; they cause material (trans-)formation of the Pentecostal self and his/her (e.g. material) situation through the spiritual realm. During one thanksgiving service in Tower of God, one young man gave the following testimony: "I have failed my exams, but I thank God that I am still here." Later, Pastor Olawale corrected his *way* of using the words in his testimony. He said that instead of admitting defeat, the man should have said "I thank God because I have already won!"⁶⁸ Teaching with and about the word and its use is often the job of the pastor, but can in theory be done by anyone.⁶⁹ In the same Sunday service, Pastor Olawale instructed the congregation to take their Bibles, individually open them in a random place and collectively (at the same time), and find a scripture relevant to them personally. Then, in a humming cacophony of different words and speeds, but all at the same time, each individual started to 'profess' their personal prophecy.⁷⁰

The utterance of such 'working words' also contribute to the Pentecostalisation of born-again Christians' lives and environments, by testifying, prophesying and decreeing positive change for people, buildings and nations, as well as producing Pentecostal sounds by praying and singing aloud. Here, the "performative and even physical characteristics of words are often regarded to be of equal importance to their semantic or cognitive dimensions" (Coleman and Collins 2000: 323).

⁶⁸ Fieldnotes, 06-03-2011.

⁶⁹ In my experience, men are more often considered 'teachers' than women, even though in the RCCG doctrinal guidelines both men and women are considered to have potentially the same spiritual authority.

⁷⁰ Fieldnotes, 06-03-2011.

Since the body is crucial in Pentecostal practice, and people, their bodies and their behaviour are perceived as either male or female, Pentecostal practices and lifestyle must always be gendered. This can be the case explicitly, e.g. in doctrines about sexuality or marital and family life. But also seemingly gender neutral matters are framed in gendered terms: men who submit to God are described as Jesus 'brides', and women seem to be perceived as more open to be 'filled with the Holy Spirit' than men, due their a degree higher emotionality.

Mobility is a further factor that shapes the Pentecostalisation of people's lives. A person's body relates to their physical environments and retain memories of their trajectories. Armour and St. Ville state that "[e]ach subject carries the traces of its own history of bodily and emotional investment." They foreground the accomplishment of a bodily ego through a 'gendered/sexed' subjectivity (2006: 6-7), but I wish to add the role of a migratory subjectivity. In the Yoruba diaspora caused by the transatlantic slave trade, such a gendered/mobile subjectivity is prominent in the use of language, ways of dressing and food (see e.g. Hucks 2006, Clarke 2004). In RCCG Tower of God mobility and reference to Nigeria inform similar *sensational forms* "that are anchored in a taken-for-granted sense of self and community, indeed a *common sense* that is rarely subject to questioning exactly because it is grounded in shared perceptions and sensations. *Common sense* is what gets under the skin, enveloping us in the assurance 'this is what really is'" (Meyer 2006: 20).

In Tower of God service such a shared common sense of London-Lagos finds its expression in frequent thanksgiving for 'journey mercies' after a member's trip to Nigeria, regular invitations of pastors as guest speakers along a global Nigerian Pentecostal network, as well as the use of Yoruba proverbs in sermons. Other examples of interconnections between body, gender, mobility and an embodiment of a shared Nigerian/Yoruba experience will be discussed in more detail around dress practices (Chapter Five), sexuality (Chapter Five and Six) and biological reproduction (Chapter Seven) that mark a Pentecostalisised lifestyle.

Encapsulation and Openness as Continuum

RCCG parishes such as Tower of God are financially independent (though embedded in a larger RCCG network), and provide their members with a social and spiritual ‘church family’. They develop particular religious practices and sensational forms that may be most familiar and acceptable to other Nigerians. They shape the formation of Pentecostal Nigerian selves and embody their particular conditions. Even on Sunday mornings the church entrance is guarded – of course any new visitor would be warmly welcomed, but he or she would be identified as a newcomer from ‘outside’. These factors seem to suggest a strong encapsulation of the church, a ‘migrant community organisation’ that is part of a self-contained and culturally different Yoruba/Nigerian/Pentecostal *parallel* universe.⁷¹ And indeed, some studies support this view. Hunt and Lightley (2001) see the RCCG as a minority organisation in a hostile European context. Hunt argues that the RCCG offers their members an identity along ethnic terms and distinguishes them from a British ‘outside’ (2002: 165). Ukah (2009) suggests that RCCG membership allows for a legitimisation of the stay of their members in Europe, independently from legal approval by European nation states.

I would like to argue, though, that the RCCG’s ‘inside’ and an ‘outside’ are overlapping, interwoven and a question of perspective, rather than being parallel and mutually exclusive. In Amsterdam, different geographies are projected onto the same territory with a concentration of Nigerian-born residents. On the one hand a map of criminalisation by the police, on the other hand a map of a successfully expanding Christianity by Nigerian Pentecostals. But rather than accepting the dichotomy of ‘us’ and ‘them’ that often underlies studies of ‘parallel societies’ (Knibbe 2009: 140), Knibbe describes this situation as creating a “*force-field* of contradicting geographies within which such an individual [a believer] must move in Amsterdam” (ibid.: 137, my emphasis). Such a perspective makes tensions and power relations visible in areas where contrasting perspectives are negotiated. In the case of Amsterdam, Knibbe shows

⁷¹ *Parallelgesellschaft* is an often used expression in a German (political and media) context to mark immigrant networks. It is coined from a white/nation state perspective and carries negative populist connotations.

that this leads to the further criminalisation of immigration issues by the police and an increase of fear among ordinary Nigerians.

Such tensions between Nigerian Pentecostals and European state perceptions can indeed reinforce tendencies of encapsulation in an institution like the RCCG that seeks to be a welcoming and safe environment for members and visitors. A force-field approach, however, allows us to see the RCCG as a *social force* (Burgess et al. 2010) and encapsulation as one among many modes of interaction.⁷² The RCCG in the UK aims to be a ‘corporate citizen’ (Ukah 2009: 116). The individual parishes that I have visited are engaged in civic and welfare activities, and collaborate with councils and police; Jesus House has a ministry for members interested in British politics, runs a drop-in centre in a near-by council estate and has a team that visits elderly people in care homes; Victory House and others offer regular health clinics, counselling services and legal advice to members and local residents; many parishes hand out Christmas hampers to neighbours and visit care homes or prisons.

Despite a certain encapsulation along ethnic lines, the RCCG UK’s practices are not necessarily identical with those of the RCCG in Nigeria. I have noticed significant differences in respect to themes of sermons and prayers, dressing practices and the use of language. From 2009, the RCCG UK parishes had an adapted edition of the RCCG’s Sunday School Manual, which used to be the same all over the world. Individual parishes make use of a certain freedom inherent in the RCCG structure to handle specific matters independently. Jesus House members deliberately distance themselves from conservative ‘Nigerian’ parenting and gender practices.⁷³

These efforts point to the fact that the Church’s ethnic encapsulation is not just voluntary. So far, the RCCG “has failed to convert Europeans and Americans because of its locally grounded religious ideology which does not appeal to these non-Africans” (Ukah 2005a: 338-339). But in part, the diasporic adaptations aim at attracting more people without Nigerian background to the church.

⁷² Their study encompasses the RCCG in Germany, the Netherlands and the UK.

⁷³ This was consistent in interviews with staff and members; Jesus House also offers parenting classes that question parenting styles that many identified as ‘Nigerian’.

Later chapters offer a deeper analysis of RCCG members' problematic relationship with the British state around issues of child care, as well as their aim to missionise Europe (see Chapter Seven and Chapter Eight). Here, I wish to emphasise that in its current state between being an 'ethnic enclave' and a 'cosmopolitan' corporate entity (Ukah 2009: 121), the RCCG UK and its members, draw on the transnational social space of London-Lagos to relate to Nigerian-born members alongside relating to the British nation state and society.

Rather than ethnicity or territory, it is their spiritual practice - the Pentecostalisation of believers' journeys and experiences, as well as their inclusion of Nigeria and the UK in one and the same Kingdom of God - which marks people as RCCG members. Believers can aim to convert Europe through their practice, but the church's success and the nature of the membership is in the hands of God, and no one can question it.

God gives that privilege that churches become influences all around, you know, in their community, in the town, in the estates, in the country. So there are seasons in their times. (...) And now it's probably Redeemed's time, at the moment it's everywhere. You've got America, they have got hundreds of churches, you've got England, anyway, they're in the season obviously.⁷⁴

The territorial and ethnic ambivalences and the tendency towards a certain encapsulation are perhaps most poignantly embodied in the RCCG's spiritual and social centre, Redemption Camp. It is situated in Nigeria, about thirty kilometres outside Lagos along the accident- and robbery-ridden Expressway to Ibadan. Behind the fence and guarded entrance lies an entire holy town marked by an atmosphere of urbanity, organised tidiness, wealth and education. The layout is generous. Roads with names like 'Holiness Street' lead to banks, book shops and supermarkets, a maternity clinic, petty traders' stalls, a university, hair salons, internet cafés, schools, restaurants, conference halls, several parish church buildings, a recreation centre, the workers' quarters, a hostel and the villas of permanent and temporary residents. Most outstanding are the General Overseer's walled-in palace (with grazing horses on the lawn around it) and the huge

⁷⁴ Interview with Kunmi and his wife Rosemary, 25-07-2011; conducted jointly with Simon Coleman.

new prayer arena. Redemption Camp possesses its own water and electricity system that makes a relatively regular supply possible - very much a rarity in the rest of Nigeria. It has its own construction firms and machines, security guards and fleet of motorbike taxis, plus the labour force required. Many congregations have their own houses or rooms in the camp to put up their pastors and visiting members.

Although the Camp is rather self-sufficient and insulated, its vibrancy depends crucially on the contact and contract with the outside. It is usually quiet in the Camp (except for the GO's sermons that are broadcast into the streets), as it is sparsely populated and many permanent residents work in nearby Lagos. But every month, RCCG members and thousands of other Christians and curious or needy people flood in to attend the Holy Ghost Service featuring the GO and other speakers. Twice a year, ministers and members from all over the Nigeria and the whole world travel to the Camp for the 'Convention' in August and the 'Holy Ghost Congress' in December.



Illustration 4: Signboard 'God dwells here'

in Redemption Camp near Lagos.

It is essential that the 'Camp' is close to the big city. Lagos residents often come for specific mid-week services. Women with difficulties in conceiving, like my Lagos

hostess, regularly attend ‘Shiloh Hour’ that is held monthly in a Monday morning. Lagos on one side, and the surrounding ‘bush’ land on the other, serve as a stark contrast against which the orderliness and safety of the camp shines. Lagos is the economic capital of Nigeria with its port, banks and markets. It is more than twice as big as London and extremely densely populated, with an extremely inadequate infrastructure in areas of housing, water, electricity and transport. The socio-political situation in Nigeria has fostered a heightened sense of insecurity and mistrust in the country. Against this backdrop, “Redemption Camp is not only a sacred site (...), but also a model of the kind of modern community that Nigerians aspire to and, in the main, don’t find in their national society” (Peel 2008: xxi). Lizzy is a member of RCCG Tower of God in London and active in their drama group. She used to live in Eastern Nigeria and had only been to Redemption Camp in the Southwest once before she came to Britain. She was utterly impressed. “[W]hen you are there you don’t want to ... you feel as if you are in heaven. You don’t want to come back. (...) when you are there ... in the arena [the main auditorium]... you know, you’re in heaven, let me just put it that way”⁷⁵ (see Illustration 4).

Conclusion

With its high numbers of parishes and members and its generally positive reputation, the RCCG in London is an important social and spiritual player among Nigerians, Yoruba-Nigerians and Nigerian Pentecostals in London, and vis-à-vis the British state. At a first glance, the RCCG parishes in the UK may thus seem like ethnic migrant organisations with their distinct morality, guarded doors and Yoruba-dominated membership. However, I suggest that the RCCG draws on London-Lagos as resource rather than simply being ‘Nigerian’ and that the church is one among many agents in a socio-political force-field. Then, the church’s encapsulation can be seen in its co-dependencies with several ‘outsides’ and as a mode to negotiate tensions of authority in Nigeria, the UK and within the church. Both encapsulation and outreach or openness are

⁷⁵ Interview, 26-08-2009.

located on the same continuum of an ambivalent mode of relating to one's environment and oneself in a Pentecostalist way.

The RCCG is marked by a dialectic relationship between a morally sound 'inside' and a sinful 'outside' society that needs intervention. Such ambivalence towards wider society is produced in embodied religious practices in and beyond the church. However, the practices within the RCCG are also marked by a deep ambivalence between hierarchic and participatory dynamics. The next chapter examines more closely these power relations between participation and obedience. It embeds local RCCG parishes such as Tower of God and its members further in the history, structure and the ambivalent and gendered power relations of the RCCG in Nigeria and worldwide.

Chapter Four

The (Re-)Production of Authority and Hierarchy

One Sunday, after his sermon in the first service in the RCCG parish Tower of God, Pastor Olawale reads out parts of an anonymous letter that he had received some days ago.⁷⁶ It is a computer print on formal cream coloured paper with a matching envelope. As he reads, he interrupts to comment, to both the congregation and the author whom he seems to suspect among the listeners. The writer addresses the pastor with the “Calvary Greetings” of a fellow born-again and recognises him respectfully as a mathematician, as an ex-military man, as a child of the heavenly father and a true “man of God”. Then the letter becomes critical: in the seven years that the author has been with the parish, the pastor has become more “relaxed” over the punishment for moral failures of the church members. “Why are you pampering the flock?” the letter asks, “You know, if you spare the rod you will spoil the child!” The author continues: “What is happening to the third mission of the RCCG?” – which is the “law of holiness”, as Pastor Olawale explains to the congregation, who hold their breath while listening to the letter’s accusations of pastoral failure. The letter asks “Where are you taking us?” – an upfront, direct questioning of the pastor’s spiritual intentions and legitimacy. The pastor answers “Where am I taking you? To heaven!!!” To him, the slow growth of his congregation is a confirmation of this, because the ‘right’ path is too uncomfortable for many. “Mind you, people are watching!” the letter threatens. The pastor challenges the author with his reply: “You can buy extra eyes to watch if you can! You will never find me in a tight corner.” As far as I can tell, the core issue of the controversy seems to be the practice of ‘marriage blessing’. In this, a pastor publicly blesses a couple that already got formally married e.g. at the registry office or in Nigeria. A cohabiting,

⁷⁶ Fieldnotes, 20-09-2009.

formally unmarried couple cannot be married in the RCCG, but whether such a couple can hold a 'marriage blessing' in the church after having done a registry marriage is a controversial issue. The pastor does not deny that there are cases of illegitimate sex in the congregation, but he says that he cannot curse or condemn them: "That would not be Christ-like at all". If people have been suspended from punishment for sexual wrong-doings, this has happened in line with RCCG guidelines. After reading the letter, the pastor asks the author to disclose his identity and see him one-to-one later. I look around me. No one comes out. Many of the listeners seem to be on the side of the pastor and upset by the daring letter-writer for questioning his intentions. Tense silence fills the air, most have serious facial expressions. Some have clapped to support the points the pastor makes in his defence. Pastor Olawale's implicitly answers the accusations of the letter with a prayer point, which portrays the author of the letter as the questionable personality rather than him: "Lord, help me not to mix with people who deceive me".

“Pastor, Where Are You Taking Us?”

One way of negotiating the tension between the 'inside' of the Christian family church and the 'outside' of un-believers that ought to be reached out to (which I have described in the previous chapter) is by (re)producing a simultaneously distinct but open *RCCG Culture* among its members worldwide. Such a culture provides a strategy for believers to interpret and handle moral dilemmas – most poignantly the ambivalences around individual agency and the obtaining of wealth. Like other social processes, the reproduction of the RCCG Culture is crucially shaped by power relations. The RCCG's structures of authority, however, are not just means of production, they are also contents. The legitimacy of leadership and the quest for submission becomes a moral question that has to be negotiated within the ambivalence between participation and individual responsibility of the members on one hand and the vertical church hierarchy and submission as an act of faith on the other hand. This chapter will introduce the internal power structures of the RCCG worldwide. It looks at how the RCCG - with Pastor Adeboye at the top - carves a corporate identity out of moral ambivalences around gender, agency and the accumulation of wealth and transmits its doctrines and practices within London-Lagos and within its strategy of church growth.

The situation that I described in the vignette above, illustrates how the negotiations around religious authority in RCCG worldwide translate to a local level. The author of the letter positions him/herself as a committed, born-again Christian and dedicated RCCG Tower of God member, and thus ascribes moral authority to him/herself. The letter's author bases such authority on the reference to an authority above Pastor Olawale - the General Overseer Adeboye - by claiming to guard the spiritual and moral principles of the RCCG in general. Though he or she does not dismiss Pastor Olawale's leadership qualities altogether, the writer of the letter reminds the pastor of the subordinate aspect of his position in the RCCG hierarchy.

Olawale knows that he needs the approval of the members of his church to legitimise his leadership position. He takes the accusations seriously and brings them before his congregation to confirm their loyalty. By reading the letter out loud, he demonstrates fearlessness and witty use of language. Unlike the author, Olawale has no reason to hide behind anonymity. He denies having 'relaxed': he is not aware of any changes in the last seven years. The letter's author's highlighting of – according to Olawale himself non-existent - disharmony in the pastor's home serves to point out his/her potential malicious intentions. Pastor Olawale emphasises that his pastoral actions are always in line with RCCG principles. Then, he refers to an authority even higher than the GO: the Bible. If people fail morally, he can only plead with them to repent before God. And as it is not Christ-like to condemn, he has to bless them. Finally, he shows moral superiority by demonstrating his willingness to patiently engage with the author despite the arrogant, aggressive and challenging tone. Reading from the earnest reaction of the congregation, the author of the letter has clearly trespassed the appropriate boundaries of participation of church members. I was unable to follow up on the further development of the case, but in the service, the pastor seems to have 'won' the battle around his authority.

This incident reveals some of the channels through which authority can be acquired or dismantled in interplay, a double bind, of horizontal and vertical power structures. The power of pastors as well as the success of the whole church depends strongly on loyalty to the GO and his handful of advisors at the top, as well as the millions of members'

involvement in their congregation. The religious studies scholar Matthews Ojo described this ambivalence in the RCCG's power relations as a *democratisation of duties* and responsibilities in the church's activities that is coupled with an *authoritarian decision-making structure* in the steering-process of setting rules and regulations. This structural tension is deepened by the fact that is relatively easy to obtain a 'position' at the bottom of the hierarchy, but much more difficult to climb the bottle-neck shaped hierarchy beyond, say, the position of the Area or Zonal Pastor.⁷⁷

Participation as Basis of the RCCG's Expansion

The enormous church growth since the 1990s would not have been possible without the identification with the church of hundreds of thousands of members and their instrumental efforts in missionisation and church planting worldwide. Today, the Redeemed Christian Church of God (RCCG) is a neo-Pentecostal church with an emphasis on the manifestation of divine blessings and miracles in this world.⁷⁸ Like many other such churches, its centre is in the Yoruba-dominated Southwest of Nigeria, in and around Lagos, the Pentecostal hub of the country. Different from other Nigerian neo-Pentecostal churches, it is historically rooted in a 'holiness' tradition. Its development is usually divided into three phases between the years of 1952-1980, 1981-1989 and 1990 until today (Adeboye 2005b: 446-452).

It was founded in Southwest Nigeria in the early 1950s by 'Papa' Josiah Akindayomi. He was a poorly educated man from rural Yorubaland with a Church Mission Society and an *Aladura* church⁷⁹ background. He founded his own fellowship and was expelled from the Aladura church Cherubim and Seraphim (C&S) in 1952. After having different

⁷⁷ Personal conversation, 20-01-2009. I am grateful for Prof. Ojo's support during my stay in Ife.

⁷⁸ For a well-researched and detailed account of history and structure of the RCCG see Ukah (2008 and 2009).

⁷⁹ Aladura churches are also known as white garment churches. They were founded in the 1920s and 1930s in Yorubaland in Southwestern Nigeria, in opposition to practices of mainline Mission Christianity (Peel 1968: 1) and emphasise the practice of expressive forms of prayer. Today, Pentecostal churches strongly distance themselves from some Aladura doctrines and practices that involve the use of e.g. candles, soap and water. Peel's study (1968) puts their emergence into a political context of colonial power struggles and rapid social change. See Peel (1968) for a general account, Crumley (2003) for gender specific accounts and Adogame (1998), Harris (2006) and Frederiks and Pruiksma (2010) for accounts of Aladura churches in the European diaspora.

names and affiliations, the church became an independent organization and adopted the name ‘Redeemed Christian Church of God’. This name is thought to have been miraculously revealed as part of a ‘covenant’ with God that promised the growth and success of the church. During the times of Akindayomi, church doctrine and practice were oriented towards the afterlife rather than this world. Practices around a holiness lifestyle – such as monogamous marriage, moderation in dressing, refusal to use technology and medicine – were at the centre of the teachings. While Akindayomi’s connection with Aladura practices is muted, his holiness roots and his ‘covenant’ with God are emphasised. Its relatively long history (in comparison with most other neo-Pentecostal churches in Nigeria) and the survival of a leadership change make the church seem more stable and increase the RCCG’s legitimacy. Before his death in 1980, Akindayomi appointed the mathematics University lecturer Enoch Adejare Adeboye as his successor to lead the only thirty-nine predominantly poor parishes (Ukah 2008: 48).

However, since the 1980s, the church has spread enormously and in 2005 it had 10,000 parishes worldwide (Ukah 2009:107). In a phase of *consolidation* (Adeboye 2007: 38), GO Adeboye *re-branded* (Ukah 2009:106) the church structure and the mission strategy. To attract specifically younger people he planted fellowships specifically on university campuses (Ojo, 1988, Ukah 2005a). In this, he may well have been influenced by the strategy of Deeper Life Bible Church which was just starting to be particularly successful among students at the time. Adeboye furthermore aimed to draw an educated urban middle class as well as wealthy and politically influential elites to the church. He initiated ‘model’ parishes where services were held in English instead of Yoruba. They were less strict concerning dressing practices (e.g. allowed brightly coloured clothing and jewellery) and less conservative in their worship style – both features tended to put off upper middle class people from attending the existing ‘classical’ parishes. They were also more open to prosperity-oriented teachings, which seemed more relevant to urban business people. Today, the model parish style is predominant in Nigeria and especially worldwide. English is the main language. Nevertheless, on a parish level, this specific history of allowing variety in doctrine and practices around holiness and prosperity installed a certain freedom for parish pastors in their teachings and has allowed members to choose a parish that suits their specific wishes in terms of doctrine and practice.

In the 1990s the church exploded (Adeboye 2007: 40), first in Nigeria and then worldwide. The dual parish system's "diversification of modes of religiosity" (Ukah 2005a: 320) that attracted more members, as well as the numerical multiplication of parishes through dividing existing parishes in several smaller ones were both crucial to this rapid spread. The church's aim was to involve members of all existing households and to cover the world's territory by planting parishes in no more than a five minute walking or driving distance from each other. This principle of anchoring the church development on a small-scale home fellowship level was influenced by Yonggi Cho's Korean ministry, which Adeboye visited as early as 1983 (Ukah 2008: 110) and is still valid today.

Ukah (2005a) likens the church to a transnational enterprise, but more than strategic planning was involved in the spread of the church. The atmosphere in Nigeria was favourable for the growth of Pentecostal churches generally: material loss through the economic crisis in the mid 1980s, the introduction of the Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) and increasing corruption and political repression left many people in desperate straits. The situation caused a sharp increase of migration of educated people in search of work, within the country and to Europe and North America. Such mobile RCCG members were particularly encouraged to set up parishes in their new place of residence. With the success of this strategy, the RCCG contributed significantly to the fact that "[i]n Nigeria, religion is arguably the country's second most successful global export after oil" (Ukah 2005a: 338). Simultaneously, the rapid growth legitimises the church and its leader as divinely blessed, among members and other Pentecostals alike.

Perhaps due to its link to migration patterns, the RCCG's expansion is organised in reference to a conventional world map with units such as continents and nation states. However, the strategy of 'covering territories', coupled with the centralisation of the church, also creates the impression of a distinct 'RCCG map'; a map that relies on the global structure of nation states, but renounces their political aims (Knibbe 2009: 143).

This reading of the RCCG almost as a ‘Kingdom of God’ empire reaffirms our thesis of the transnational field London-Lagos and shows its multilayeredness.⁸⁰

Between 1992 and 2008, there were 184 parishes successfully established in the UK and Ireland.⁸¹ London has one of the highest densities of RCCG branches outside of Nigeria. In 2008,⁸² 112 parishes in London and its surroundings were registered with the headquarters in Lagos. The RCCG UK headquarters moved from Borehamwood to Knebworth in 2009, both in Hertfordshire, just outside London. The Overseer for the UK is Pastor Agu, who is at the same time the senior pastor of Jesus House in Northwest London, the biggest RCCG parish in the whole of Europe. The Executive Council is made up of Pastor Agu and two other senior pastors. All ordained ministers meet regularly. All Church Workers meet bi-annually just before the Festival of Life (FoL). The FoL is held in London, usually in the Excel Exhibition Hall in East London, with GO Adeboye, his wife Pastor Folu Adeboye, also called ‘Mummy GO’, and other guest preachers. It is intended for the whole of the RCCG UK and the general public and is a smaller replication of the Holy Ghost Service.

Coining an ‘RCCG Culture’ out of Ambivalences

The theologian Gaiya critiques portrayals of Nigerian Pentecostalism as homogeneous (2002: 9). I agree that there are crucial differences. However, I doubt that typologies like Gaiya’s (2002: 8) help us to understand specific dynamics in Pentecostalism beyond doctrinal issues. Ojo’s (1997b) account gives an impression of the transgression of Pentecostalism’s boundaries in West-Africa, the complexity of its influences and its multilayeredness. The Nigerian historian and longstanding RCCG member, Funke Adeboye, goes as far as seeing Pentecostalism as a *cultural* movement (2005b: 439). Specifically for the RCCG, Ukah’s transnational enterprise approach suggests a certain

⁸⁰ On the wall of the International Office in Redemption Camp in Nigeria is a world map with needles stuck in the places where the RCCG is currently ‘present’. Fieldnotes, 12- 01-2009.

⁸¹ RCCG Annual Report 2008. Note, though, that such figures often vary too much for solid interpretations.

⁸² RCCG Annual Report for 2008.

coherence. And indeed this is echoed by ongoing negotiations in the church itself of what an RCCG ‘culture’ may contain (Adeboye 2007: 38).

The RCCG’s Culture⁸³ is what distinguishes the church from ‘non-believers’⁸⁴ and other Pentecostal churches and aims to be the ‘glue’ that holds the RCCG together. The following section interrogates several of the inner contradictions of ambivalence that are negotiated and that the RCCG has to juggle. The vastness of the institution, the competitive Pentecostal market place and the explosion of moral discourse in a *pentecostalite* (Meyer 2004a) public sphere in Nigeria, make this a challenge.

Following the logic of the transnational enterprise metaphor, the RCCG Culture can be seen as a *corporate identity* which is maintained in the replication process of parishes, practices and hierarchies. The contents is directed by the ‘mother firm’ in Nigeria: regular reports have to be sent back to Nigeria; pastors all over the world are ordained by Adeboye himself; teaching material, Bible study manuals and pre-manufactured sermons are sent out from Lagos all over the globe. This restricts the thematic and financial freedom of pastors and congregations, but also offers advantages of being part of a bigger entity – especially for mobile members. Services, ceremonies and even worship songs are uniform and create a familiarity that makes it easy to change parishes. Membership cards and reference letters are valid everywhere and a church worker can quickly resume a similar position in a new parish.

Within this framework of uniformity is some room for variation. Even though they may preach on the same scriptures on a Sunday, for many congregants I have met, the personality (or spiritual ‘gifts’) of ‘their’ pastor are seen as crucial for the specific atmosphere and interpretations of the RCCG teachings. In addition, there are variations between the RCCG in Nigeria and the UK, e.g. in dressing practices. In most parishes in Nigeria women cover their hair, shoulders and knees and wear skirts rather than

⁸³ This is my term, but in interviews this was sometimes referred to as ‘God Culture’, e.g. in an interview with RCCG Jesus House member and employee Dami Oludoyin, 02-11-2008. I wish to emphasise that I do not understand ‘culture’ in an essentialist sense, but as discursively constructed to (re-)produce the power relations that I describe in this chapter.

⁸⁴ The term as it is used in the RCCG refers to all people who are not ‘born-again’ Christians and includes believers of other faiths.

trousers, but in the UK these rules can be flexibly applied.⁸⁵ The number of members as well as the socio-economic background may be other factors that distinguish RCCG parishes from each other and cause tension. Newly planted parishes are often very small and thus under considerable strain concerning finances and work-load. One branch I visited in Ibadan had struggled for two years without being able to increase its membership. As the parishes are located in a huge variety of settings, from rural farming villages to small towns, to university campuses and Lagos's business districts, the social class of the congregations also varies considerably.⁸⁶ In the UK, we can see a certain variation in class and background, too. Jesus House tends to be visited by wealthier people with a higher level of education than, say, Tower of God. But this gap tends to be less prominent than in Nigeria, as the ability to migrate depends on a certain wealth and education in the first place. Furthermore, London functions as a social *leveller* (Vasta and Kandilige 2007). Disharmony in congregations can often be ironed out by pastors or members changing to a parish that suits them better or volunteering to support a new church plant. -In other churches such clashes often cause secessions.

In some ways the developments in the RCCG reflect developments in Nigerian Christianity in a wider sense. Its roots in Aladura and holiness practices, the re-orientation towards a more this-worldly, prosperity-oriented doctrine and the growth from the 1980s are very much in line with similar developments in other Nigerian Christian contexts. "The pendulum of cultural change, which for many decades has swung toward Africanization, now swings back to more transnational idioms such as Pentecostalism provides" (Peel 2000: 317).⁸⁷

The RCCG also reflects some of the political developments of the big West African country. Political violence and corruption rose throughout and after the prosperous years of the oil boom in the 1970s. Money seemed to appear from nothing, but was also distributed unevenly through opaque channels. "In contemporary Nigeria, Pentecostal understandings of the supernatural have become a primary idiom through which

⁸⁵ The moral controversies around dressing are discussed in some detail in Chapter Five.

⁸⁶ Dr. Adewale, one of my interviewees in Ile-Ife, suggested that class in Nigeria should be measured by a combination of the degree of wealth and/or the level of education of an individual, rather than their family background. Interview, 28-01-2009.

⁸⁷ This is not to suggest that Aladura Christianity saw a decline over the years. See for the stable influence of Aladura churches in the diaspora context Harris (2006).

ordinary Nigerians interpret the injustices and inequalities of the country's political economy" (Smith 2007: 214). Such an atmosphere of spiritually caused heightened insecurity, suspicion and fear (Smith 2007, Marshall 2009: especially 92ff) fuels the attraction of Pentecostalism as alternative way of living (Ukah 2003: 210).⁸⁸

I believe that the tremendous appeal of Pentecostal Christianity [in Nigeria] can be better explained by taking into account its relationship to Nigerian's experience with and understandings of corruption. This is not to say that the rise of Pentecostal Christianity should be understood primarily as a response to corruption. (...) But considering born-again Christianity and corruption together offers insights about each other that are productive and well warranted, especially given the way in which Nigerians themselves perceive the relationship between the two (Smith 2007: 210).

Smith's study draws on material from the East of Nigeria, but the wider socio-political developments he describes, occurred in a similar way in the Southwest of the country. "The name of the Lord is / a strong tower / the righteous run into /and they are safe / blessed be the name of the Lord / blessed be the name of the Lord / ..." are the lyrics of a popular praise song I often heard in the RCCG in Nigeria and in London. In the RCCG, the 'strong tower' takes the shape of an almost alternative society. The church carries out public services that the Nigerian state does not provide: in forty schools, Maternity Centres, a programme to fight "AIDS, cultism among youth and crime", the AIDS programme RAPAC, a rehabilitation centre for drug addicts in Lagos, orphanages, ministries for prostitutes, area boys and prisoners (Adeboye 2005b : 451-452).

Ultimately, the church seeks to 'convert nations' in Nigeria and worldwide and thus engages more directly with state structures, governments and other elites to achieve this – without being caught up in the political game. In order to balance this tension for its individual members, the RCCG offers a kind of alternative, spiritually whitewashed national citizenship. Prosperity doctrines provide the possibility to be wealthy in a

⁸⁸ While promoting social justice, Jude Dibia's novel (2007) reminds us that some Pentecostals are simultaneously engaged in the suppression of certain selves. Here, a homosexual man in Lagos is brutally 'delivered' from his gay 'demons' by Pentecostal 'Pastor Matthew'.

spiritually legitimate way. On an institutional level, the church authorities engage with political figures by for instance inviting them to their services. RCCG elites engage in “cordial (but unadvertized)” relationships with ruling elite (Adeboye 2007:43). Big economic and political elites such as former President Obasanjo, are sympathetic with the church, although often not members (Adeboye 2005b: 451).⁸⁹

Believing in Bodies

The RCCG Culture and its (gendered) dynamics of authority is performed with and transmitted through bodies. In ritual practices such as worship and prayer that I have described in the last chapter, the RCCG members learn to distinguish ‘good’ from ‘bad’ impulses and to train it to become ‘sin-free’. This training does not occur in a powerless space: pastors guide and moderate such faith acts, suggest actions and how this may feel, look etc. In deliverance sessions, for example, the pastor marks masturbation or the naughtiness of one’s children as negative and ‘spiritually caused’ to then eradicate them with the Holy Spirit. The repeated citation of such sexual or behavioural norms re-enforces and consolidates the pastoral power that is involved in the ritualised action (see Hollywood 2006). The following passage of a ‘crusade’ on the campus of Obafemi Awolowo University in Ife/Nigeria with GO Adeboye, shows how embodied faith is transmitted and just how close discursive representation and practice are interwoven.⁹⁰

GO Adeboye: Let somebody shout Hallelujah.

Congregation: Hallelujah!!!

GO: And shake hand with one or two and say to them, joy to the wise...

C: Joy to the wise...

GO: ...that means joy to me...

⁸⁹ Mainly Chapter Seven and Chapter Eight will offer a deeper portrait of the complex relationship of the RCCG with the British and to some extent the Nigerian nation state.

⁹⁰ Transcribed audio CD, 22-01-2009.

C: ...that means joy to me...

GO: ... because I refuse to be a fool.

C: ...because I refuse to be a fool!!

GO: Aha, if you believe that, put your hands together for the almighty God.

C: (applaud, cheers)

GO: God bless you, you may be seated if you have a seat (C – laugh), if you have no seat don't worry, blessings come from above...

C: (cheers, laughter)

GO: ...so it will reach those who are standing before...

C: (cheers!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!)

GO: (laughs) Somebody shout hallelujah.

C: Hallelujah!!!!

GO: I appreciate the eagerness of people wanting a touch, but believe me, honestly, there is tremendous power in the Word. The Word of God is God Himself. God says 'in the beginning was the Word, and the Word was God, and the Word was with God'. Now this Word is the one that became flesh and dwelled among us. Just when the Word is going, coming out from the almighty God, that is the time you shall receive your miracle. There are people who will say, 'Oh, unless he prays for me, unless he lays his hand on me and shake my head until he nearly uproot it from my neck I won't receive anything' ...

C: (laughter)

GO: ... they need to be 'unto you according to your faith' - which means you will have to wait for a loooong time [because the faith of those who believe they need to be physically touched is small]. Whereas if you come saying, 'If only I can just hear the Word of God, I know God will solve my problem', then it will be 'unto you according to your faith'! ...How many of you believe that even before I finish speaking today, your miracle will be yours?!

C: Amen!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

GO: Good. God bless you.

C: Amen!

The collective effort of agreeing by answering loud and appropriately with ‘Amen’ or ‘Hallelujah’ renders Adeboye powerful. But simultaneously, *through* their (bodily) submission to the pattern of action Adeboye suggests, the audience taps into his powerfully legitimised connection with God. This pattern of repetition, interaction and interspersed jokes is similar in the whole of the RCCG and indeed many Pentecostal Nigerian churches.⁹¹ The formula “Joy to the wise and joy to me, I refuse to be a fool.” was the year 2009’s mantra, based on a revelation and enthusiastically repeated over and over all around the world. Such words are pre-manufactured and selected by Adeboye, but let believers experience their faith and bind together the RCCG version of the transnational field of London-Lagos. Religious “rituals become the ‘living memory of the changing same’” (Fortier 2000: 173, quoting Gilroy 1993a:198), and the moments of reproduction of the RCCG Culture are lived in motions, like journeys, or ritualized bodily gestures (Fortier 2000: 174).

Authority of Pastors through Miracles and Moderation

A major part of the shaping of such “memories of the changing same” in the RCCG worldwide is the specific way holiness and prosperity teachings are balanced. The legacy of the RCCG early holiness-orientation under Akindayomi is instrumental here. Then, life on this earth was seen as the means to enter into heavenly eternity in the next world after death. Living sin-free, and rejecting bodily pleasure and wealth was at the core to achieve this. Prosperity teachings became popular in the USA from the 1950, spearheaded by preachers such as Oral Roberts and Kenneth Hagin (Coleman 2002) and have become popular in West-African Pentecostalism since the 1980s (Gifford 1990). The prosperity gospel in Nigeria is gaining influence even on social behaviour in a wider sense (Folarin n.d.). Its contents focuses on the possibility of joy, success and material achievements in ‘this’ world as the divine right of believers.

Unsurprisingly, there is significant tension in doctrine and practice between the holiness and prosperity *brands* of Pentecostalism, and theological and even public debates in

⁹¹ See Okoye (2007) for an account of Pastor Chris Oyakhilome’s performative practices. He oversees that Nigerian neo-Pentecostal ministry ‘Christ Embassy’.

Nigeria are influenced by their mutual accusations of being ‘wrong’. Some of my interviewees described current holiness churches (such as e.g. Deeper Life) as boring, judgemental and exclusivist. Others grew up attending Deeper Life with their parents and are fond of a strict holiness lifestyle as morally ‘pure’. Such interviewees criticised the wealth of pastors and suspect them to use the church to make money.

The RCCG of today manages the tension between holiness and prosperity teachings by holding on to holiness doctrines, but re-interpreting them in the context of newer prosperity teachings in a distinct ethos (Adeboye 2007). The result is a mixture specific for the RCCG Culture, in which the achievement of prosperity is (only) possible *through* a state of holiness. This state of holiness is an *inner* condition that depends on a personal relationship with God and can therefore be judged by outsiders only to a limited extent. In the RCCG, the possibility of material success is juxtaposed with strong exhortations about ‘moderation’. God does not need to be reminded of His promises to provide for His children. Rather, believers should concentrate on fulfilling their bit of the divine covenant: obeying His Word. If one lives holy their ‘miracle must surely come to pass’ - automatically.

The emphasis on miracles can be seen as a mediation effort between the basic needs of the members for scarce resources like money, education, work (both in Nigeria and the UK) and the unevenly distributed or immoral possibility of acquiring them (in a context of Nigerian corruption or UK ‘illegalisation’ and racism). However, Marshall’s analysis points out the ambiguity of agency that is implicit in a *miracle economy*. The miracles of a prosperity doctrine aim to stabilise the Nigerian (and Nigerian migrants’) conditions of lack and uncertainty; yet, at the same time, they produce the ambiguity and insecurity they seek to overcome: “In the prosperity articulation, the ‘impossible gift’ [miracle] takes the economic form of exchange (...) And yet (...) it is a mystery” – it has the potential to suspend obedience, but it also stabilises authority at the same time (Marshall 2009: 192).

Doctrinally, the basis of the miracle economy is the power of the Holy Spirit. He is God’s agent on earth, can intervene in people’s lives and turn their destinies around for the better. Believers evoke his presence and access His help by faith, prayers, obedience

to God etc.⁹² However, God alone decides and one can never be sure that the miraculous intervention will actually happen. Hence, no matter how seemingly mechanically the miracle economy operates, in effect there is a considerable element of randomness that rules the believer's possibility of accessing the power of the Holy Spirit. This uncertainty affects the agency of the individual believer in crucial ways. Paradoxically, the Holy Spirit is the means of RCCG members' empowerment (when they have done everything 'right'), while simultaneously reproducing their powerlessness (because no believer can be perfectly godly). A believer can plead for God's mercy to overcome his/her imperfection. But it does not remove his/her powerlessness; rather it adds just another layer to the same structural ambiguity of agency.

One's agency and power depends incessantly trying to be righteous before God. The General Overseer, Pastor E. A. Adeboye, is the prime role model for how the difficult balancing act between holiness and prosperity practices should be carried out in daily life in order to secure legitimate authority under such conditions of ambiguity of agency. The humble beginnings of his ministry are often recounted as the backdrop for his enormous (miraculous) success. Today, Adeboye travels all over Nigeria and the world to speak, has published many books, and his picture (often with his wife) can be seen in all churches and many homes in the form of posters, greeting cards and calendars (see Illustration 5). His sermons are filmed or recorded, broadcast online, sold as DVDs, quoted in Nigerian media or transcribed in books. Many followers have written about his biography and experiences. Countless anecdotes portray him as 'special', either by emphasising his modest behaviour and poverty-ridden past, or his wealth, power and eccentricity.

⁹² The RCCG specific *faith economy* will be discussed in more detail in Chapter Eight.



Illustration 5: Calendar showing GO Adeboye and wife
in an RCCG member's living room in Lagos.

“Adeboye is a major celebrity (...) a player on Nigeria’s public stage” (Peel 2008: xxi). Peel recalls an incident when Adeboye wore three shirts at the same time. The shirts were then soaked in oil in order to transmit Adeboye’s anointing that had gone into the shirts. During a service, members were encouraged to anoint themselves with this specially charged oil “on the head, mouth and hand to bring healing, prosperity and answers to prayers” (Peel 2008: xxiii). Such practices are only believable, if Adeboye’s authority, success and prosperity are constructed as a result of his total devotion to God and his ministry. He receives wealth and the divine power to perform miracles only through his obedience to God.

[T]he miracle-working charisma of Adeboye himself has been critical to the success of the RCCG as his organizational astuteness. Though he comports himself in a fairly mild and modest fashion, Adeboye has unquestioned authority within the RCCG, his utterances being regarded as the equivalent of direct messages from God (...) and his visionary revelations are absolutely normative (Peel 2008: xxiii).

At the Holy Ghost Night in Redemption Camp, the Festival of Life in the UK, public crusades and his visits in congregations and workers' gatherings, people flock in to hear his word and be in his presence. During the period of prophecies and revelations, the audience is highly alert and enthusiastically jumps off their seats, stretching out their hands into the air to literally catch the words of promise and blessing he utters (see also Illustration 16 in Chapter Eight). His spiritual power coupled with the humility and trustworthiness of Adeboye's person seem to be crucial factors among my interviewees in London and Nigeria that 'pull' people into the church.

The involvement of the mass of church workers, deacon(esse)s, assistant pastors and pastors at the bottom of hierarchy could be called democratisation of labour, and stands in stark contrast to the authoritarian rule in terms of decision-making of the very few at the top, mainly Adeboye, and perhaps his wife and Personal Advisors. However, the balance of holiness versus prosperity and the miracle economy that are the basis of the RCCG's positive reputation require an intimate interplay of the few at the top and the many at the bottom. As much as the church members need Adeboye's sound reputation and powerful miracles, Adeboye's authority also needs the affirmation of church members mediated through an 'army' of loyal pastors. Adeboye's embodied interactions with the congregation (in preaching or altar calls) that ensure his powerful position, are reproduced on all levels of the church. Pastors learn to be "ritualized agents, persons who have an instinctive knowledge of these schemes embedded in their bodies, in their sense of reality, and in their understanding of how to act in ways that both maintain and qualify the complex microrelations of power" (Bell 1992: 221, quoted in Hollywood 2006: 267).

On the ground, in parishes such as the RCCG Tower of God in London, pastors like Olawale are in charge of guiding the congregation in spiritual and everyday matters. Philemon Olawale is a slim man of average height, moderately but neatly dressed. He owns a house in Thamesmead at the outskirts of Southeast London, and drives to church almost daily in his black four-by-four car to work for the parish. He and his wife have been in the UK for more than twenty years and have three children. Among the

congregation, he is widely appreciated as a compassionate and approachable ‘daddy’. Similarly to Adeboye, in his sermons he often speaks quietly and shouts less than many other Pentecostal preachers. On the pulpit, he frequently refers to his own personal life and spiritual biography. The capacity of Tower of God to purchase their own church building as well as Olawale’s openness about his own person, cement the authenticity of his divine ‘call’ for pastoral work and hence legitimacy of his power. In an interview, he points out that “it is the owner of the load that carries it where it is heaviest”. This statement highlights the sacrifices his work involves, but also reaffirms his position at the very top as the ‘owner’ of the church, with strong decision-making powers.⁹³ As a (substitute) father to his congregants, he shapes their lives and outlook onto issues around gender and family as much as around faith. This importance of the pastor's person seems to be a general trend. The young Nigerian Christians in London whom Doubleday (2008) worked with emphasise the influence of their pastors in their lives, too. The lower we go in the RCCG hierarchy, the clearer it becomes that submission (or ‘humility’) and authority are very much intertwined. Pastors need the submission of congregants. But submission also makes believers powerful, as the boldness of the letter’s author shows in the vignette above. ‘Daddy’ Olawale is closely linked to the members of his congregation and knows many of them well. He calls individuals to discuss personal and church matters; in turn, the congregation respect him for pastoral care and guidance, and call on him to support them spiritually and practically.

Doubleday (2008) points out the striking similarity of religious authority in Nigerian churches in London with wider Yoruba patterns of patron-client relationships with ‘big men’. In the Africanist literature, ‘big men’ appear as male individuals, high up in a social (family, town, etc.) hierarchy and wealthy in money as well as in people who depend on him (Barber 1995). Although not everyone actually is a ‘big man’, all seem to aspire to being one – employing social, material and spiritual means. Barber describes this dynamic for Southwest Nigeria:

In a Yoruba town like Òkukù, (...) the social structure, though hierarchical, is open and relatively fluid. Instead of prescribing roles, it enjoins men (and

⁹³ Interview, 04-10-2008.

women too) to make themselves into whatever they can (...) encourages the impulse of ambition to take any route it can find and go as far as they can. Men make themselves, by attracting supporters; and in such a society it is also conceived that men make their gods by being their supporters (Barber 1981: 740).

This traditional form of fluid but hierarchical social relations is re-enforced by post-colonial conditions in Nigeria. As Smith puts it, “in Nigeria, power is itself evidence of strong spiritual connections; all ‘big men’ who have ‘eaten well’ are understood to have links to secret and occult forms of power” (Smith 2007: 215, in reference to Ruth Marshall-Fratani 1998: 304). Even though Pentecostalism can be seen as a counter-discourse to corruption (see Smith 2007: 210-219), patronage and prosperity teachings are both related to issues of power, authority and systems that work through materiality.

The following quote stems from a collection of Adeboye’s testimonies and demonstrates the combination of legitimate power over the well-being of many people and the responsibility that comes with it.

Some years ago (...) [m]y wife and I were about to begin to prepare for the Special Holy Ghost Service. We wanted to wait on the Lord for several days. Suddenly it occurred to us that if we were going to wait on the Lord, maybe we should ask him, “How do you want us to wait on you?” (...) He said, “All I want during this period is just that you praise me. If you are going to ask for anything at all, leave it until the last hour.” We tried. *It was not easy*. We praised him. We danced. We also did some things to show that we appreciated him. Then the Special Holy Ghost Service began. The first night, 14,000 people were healed. The second day, 16,000 people were healed (Fatogun 2008: 8, my emphasis).

The discipline Adeboye demands of himself, he demands of the church members in the form of obedience and serious engagement: unpunctuality and ‘sinful’ behaviour are sanctioned with temporary exclusion, public exposure and/or having to sit in the back rows. For the Christian Yoruba-Londoners James Doubleday worked with, becoming a ‘big man’ is the imagined end-point of their yearnings, prayers and efforts (2008: 250). Powerful pastors such as GO Adeboye signify the kind of person they aspire to become, by reproducing his habitus.

The *dialectic of authority and submission* with its implicit ambiguity of agency that is embodied in Adeboye, pastors and members, creates a double bind and is the 'glue' of the RCCG Culture. It is the central structuring principle for power relations (including gendered ones) in Pentecostal practices in and outside church as we shall see especially in Chapter Six. Only God possesses pure power and is the only being that does not have to submit. The legitimacy of all others' power and agency is *relational*. They gain their Pentecostal subjectivity by submitting to others (parents, husband, Parish Pastor, GO Adeboye, God), within interdependent relationships. The RCCG members and pastors are empowered and restricted simultaneously by the RCCG Culture: "The subject acts, but she/he acts within/at the limits of subjection" (Youdell 2006: 517).

Gendered Dimensions of Authority

Formally, the RCCG Culture is marked by a discourse of gender equality: women are allowed, sometimes even encouraged, to preach and can be ordained in the same ways as men. This is not the case in many other Pentecostal churches in Nigeria. Pastor Folu Adeboye, the 'Mother-in-Israel', occupies the highest position after the GO himself, ranking above his Assistant Overseers and the Elders. Historian Funke Adeboye is convinced of the importance of formal female leadership in churches such as the RCCG to break the *gender barrier* and empower women in other spheres such as Nigerian politics. She reckons that "a revolution has been triggered off" (Adeboye 2005a: 163).

But in practice, there are far fewer female than male RCCG pastors and even fewer women in positions above parish pastor status (Ukah, 2008: 162-166). The words of a high ranking RCCG official point to the discrepancy between discourse and reality: "There is nothing that God cannot do concerning the appointment of a female leader for the RCCG, but if I am to say my own mind: it is not possible" (ibid: 166). This situation fuels conflicts between female leaders, their colleagues and their congregants. A high-ranking pastor in Nigeria describes her struggles with multiple demands and male colleagues.

[A]s a woman, it's like you've just got to put in the extra mile; and then I have to think of my husband. (laughs) I mean, he also has a demand on my time. I have to also think of the children, you know, and be sure that I am there when I supposed to be there, outside of all of that. But the major challenge that I have found is, sometimes the men find it difficult to accept the fact that you can be a peer or a colleague that... and the mindset - not because they have actually voiced that to me, but the reaction I see sometimes - is: 'I have somebody like you at home'. But that's not me! That's the person you have at home. But with the women on the other hand, you have the challenge of: 'Who do think you are? You're just an ordinary woman like any one of us'.⁹⁴

In Europe, it seems to be somewhat easier to be a leader as a woman. One parish on the Old Kent Road in London was initiated and is led by a woman who founded daughter parishes all over the UK and in North America, many of which are female-led, too. However, even in this longstanding parish, issues of recognition ('respect') of female authority persist.⁹⁵ If married women – 'wives' – obtain a formal position in the church, they tend to be ranked lower than their husbands to demonstrate that he is the 'head'.⁹⁶

Funke Adeboye (2005a) and Bolaji Bateye (2007) both provide examples of leading Christian women in Nigeria, recent and historical. Such accounts are useful to remind us that there have always been influential female figures in representative positions. However if we focus on actual leading women alone, we risk rendering other forms of female agency invisible. The 'Mother-in-Israel' or 'Mummy GO' Folu Adeboye derives her authority from being the GO's wife and the 'mother' of the RCCG family, not from her high rank per se. This point resonates with Peel's historical study of gender dynamics in Christian missionisation in colonial Nigeria where expression of female leadership in the idiom of motherhood can be traced to a combination of a European Victorian ideal of the 'Christian wife' and the importance of the status of mother in Yoruba tradition. Being divinely 'called' into church office (such as the Provincial Pastor and the Personal Advisor above) was not experienced until the Aladura movement in the 1920s (2002: 161).

⁹⁴ Interview with female Provincial Pastor. Lagos, 14-01-2009.

⁹⁵ Interview with a female Assistant Pastor of the parish, 20-11-2008.

⁹⁶ The same applies for worldly careers, e.g. in the academic realm. Interview with University lecturer and RCCG member Dr. Adewale, Ile-Ife, 28-01-2009.

Such a concept of female agency as something that occurs despite (or even *through*) the simultaneous submission under male authority may puzzle Western feminists. African feminist theories like *stiwanism*⁹⁷ or *womanism* have however reconciled this seeming opposition. Such theories explore feminist identities that are heterosexual and pro-natal in outlook, but nevertheless concerned with forms of public participation (Mikell 1997: 4). Nigerian scholar Mary Kolawole aims to recognise the political agency of conservative women who seek “opportunities for participation in development that does not alienate men, that does not jeopardize the esteemed family system, and that celebrates motherhood” (2004: 263). Kolawole puts specific emphasis on seeing gender as a relational category. “The question of the interface between men’s and women’s spaces and the dynamics of gender relations is crucial to the ways in which gender is conceptualized in African societies” (ibid: 251). This approach allows us to discover that gender discourses and practices in the RCCG are not stuck in a cycle of mere reproduction of conservative gender norms. Rather than dismissing them, though, they shift and re-interpret existing models around (heterosexual) marriage, (reproductive) sexuality, parenthood and the (nuclear) family.

Conclusion

This chapter has shown how the RCCG reproduces and expands its followership. I suggest that it does not occur by “cloning the subordinates” (Gaiya 2002: 19), but by the formation of a particular RCCG Culture that bridges the gap between the investment of labour of broad masses of RCCG members and the authoritarian structures of decision making that only involve very few people at the top. Legitimised authority in the RCCG – be it Adeboye’s worldwide or Olawale’s on a local level - is established, secured and dismantled in a relational double bind, through the ambiguity of agency, the dialectic of obedience and power. The vignette that opened the chapter highlights the centrality of loyalty and submission, as well as the fragility of positions of authority. The incident shows that the church members possess considerable powers to damage the spiritual and

⁹⁷Stiwanism is derived from the abbreviation ‘STIWA’ which stands for ‘Social Transformation Including Women in Africa’ (Ogundipe-Leslie 1994: 229f)

social authority as well as the reputation of their leadership in and beyond the church. However, Olawale's position seems to be widely secured by the loyalty of the congregation. Stabilising factors for leadership are the element of divine calling, manifest through the performance of 'miracles'. As members can tap into their pastor's power, they are reluctant to withdraw support because of the voice of an ordinary member.

Even though the distribution of men and women in the RCCG hierarchy echoes the ideological gendered underpinning of authority, gendered dimensions of Pentecostal authority are rendered more complex by the ambiguity of Pentecostal agency. 'Submission' is female connotated, but men need to obey, too. Similarly, leadership and responsibility is distinctly male-connotated, but can be carried out by both, men and women. The next three chapters explore how the ambiguity that is inherent in the RCCG's notion of agency plays out in contexts outside the immediate influence of the church. They illuminate the ways in which the dialectic of authority and obedience shapes RCCG members' relationships with themselves through the mode of self-discipline (Chapter Five), with their spouses through the mode of female submission and male responsibility (Chapter Six) and with their children through the mode of discipline (Chapter Seven). Self-discipline, submission/responsibility and discipline are central tools in the (re-)production of an RCCG Culture and its specific understanding of agency and authority by and through its members.

Chapter Five

How to Find a Spouse

At the time of my fieldwork Precious and Danny are both in their thirties, unmarried and active members of Tower of God. They are both in the music team and the Youth group but also often volunteer on a spontaneous, informal and irregular basis. Precious grew up in Warri in Southeast Nigeria as a daughter of a strict military general and a devout Christian mother. She came to London in 2006 to take a business course with some financial support from a cousin, following the suggestion of her aunt. When I interviewed her, she was living with Sarah, a friend and fellow church member, and Sarah's husband. She used to live with her auntie, but moved out because she felt 'mature' enough. Yet, she subjects herself voluntarily to the control of her aunt by calling on her frequently. Also, Sarah is married and thus makes a more respectable housemate than another single woman. Precious is always dressed in clean and new looking clothes, in a moderate style. She wears trousers, but avoids short skirts, tops with a deep décolleté and the like. Guarding her reputation is an integral part of her faith practice, but also earns her respect from fellow church members and avoids the possibility of rumours travelling back to Nigeria, where her family and her fiancé live. She looks forward to getting married and having children. She expects to live with her future husband in Nigeria if that is where he wants them to live. However, as she would prefer them to stay in the UK she will try to influence her future husband's decision-making indirectly. For Precious, the financial situation in London is "not easy at all!" She needs to cover her rent and bills. As a 'lady', she needs a decent flat in a decent area, neat clothes and hairdressing. She tries to not let the financial situation affect her church attendance, but does not always manage to change her work shifts as a carer accordingly. Contrary to some single women she knows, she does not want to accept

financial support from men who might ask for her company or even sex in return. Danny is not engaged, but has been looking for a woman to marry for some time now. He had sexual relationships before he became born-again eight years ago, but is now chaste. Like Precious, he comes from an urban middle middle-class background in Nigeria. He grew up in Lagos where he trained and worked as a journalist and graphic designer. His department at work was going to fall victim to shortages, so Danny left his job in Lagos. He came to London four years ago, with the aim to build a more secure future. At the time of the research, he shares a small, sublet room with his Nigerian born-again friend Adekunle. He describes his place as shabby, but he is mostly out anyway. When he is not in church, he is out and about, building a client and support network for his graphic design business. Like Precious, he is under pressure to cover his bills. But much more than her, Danny focuses on building the financial framework for a married future in London and he explicitly tries to obtain contacts and clients beyond Christian and Nigerian communities. With other “like-minded” born-again Christian friends he has founded an association to promote each other’s creative talents in the areas of public speaking, writing, visual arts and music. They push each other’s ‘destinies’ forward by helping out financially or in other ways. Together they organised a launching event for Adekunle’s book,⁹⁸ which is tellingly entitled “Starting small is beautiful”.

Both Danny and Precious are working towards a better future as a married person. In order not to tamper with their ‘destiny’, they are both watchful regarding their current behaviour and social relations. At the centre of their individual and the RCCG’s concerns is how they deal with matters of sexuality. If we remember the incident of a member’s challenging letter in Tower of God (in the vignette that opened Chapter Four), it is not by chance that issues of premarital sexuality sparked the temporary crisis of Olawale’s authority. Then, the pastor rejected the call for a stricter hand and emphasised instead the individual’s responsibility for their own sin-free-ness. The last two chapters have laid out the RCCG-specific horizontal and vertical dynamics of authority, located between participation and subjugation, and negotiated around issues such as loyalty, obedience and responsibility. This is the first of three ethnography-based chapters that explore in detail how the RCCG perpetuates specific gendered social

⁹⁸ Held in RCCG premises in Southeast London, 13-06-2009.

forms (the need of getting married, having children and moulding them into Pentecostal selves) as well as three particular ways of accumulating authority and exercising power (self-discipline, submission and discipline). Self-discipline is a means to manage undesired moral behaviour and forms of sexuality. It is relevant throughout one's life, but particularly emphasised in the phase when men and women are not yet married even though they are 'of marriageable age'. This chapter investigates how Christian singles try to strike a balance between following Pentecostal sexual morals and being visible and proactive enough to find the 'right' spouse – a balance that is for example negotiated on the surface of the gendered body in practices around 'moderate dressing'.

Gendered Destinies

Like Precious and Danny, many young adults who have recently come from Nigeria to the UK to work or study are unmarried. The RCCG members I have spoken to feel that their unmarried status makes them especially vulnerable to immoral temptations in London. However, coming to London in the phase 'before marriage' also bears great potential to advance their Christian 'destiny'. Doubleday (2008) argues that elements of this idea of a gendered Christian destiny resonate with broader Yoruba concepts that his informants brought with them to London. Among his informants (as well as mine), marriage and parenthood are seen as crucial to what one is to achieve in life. Singlehood, therefore, is defined through its transitional character. Other signs of 'success' in life are good health and a long and peaceful life, visas granted, professional qualifications and promotions, and financial success, expressed in expensive clothes, cars and property ownership (Doubleday 2008: 15). The metaphor of 'life as a journey' expresses the ideal movement forwards and upwards as well as the possibility to influence it, especially for men (see e.g. Barber 1981: 740).

For the London context, this is illustrated by one of Doubleday's interlocutors, working in a low paid job, but according to his Ghanaian colleague "dressed like fashion show". But his informant is convinced that it is the low status of the job that does not fit his destiny, whereas his expensive clothes are appropriate. Though he is not (yet) wealthy in actuality, he is rich by right (Doubleday 2008: 76). The advancement of one's destiny

relies on finding out precisely what one is destined to achieve and how one is to go about it, what Doubleday calls “self-revelation” (ibid.: 123) in religious activity such as intense prayer; emotional or financial crises can trigger a process of defining one’s destiny and discovering ‘God’s plan’ (ibid.: 158-160). According to this self-revelation, one builds productive social relationships and destroys negative ones (ibid.: 139). My material largely echoes Doubleday’s results, although he tends to neglect gendered dimensions of the largely male Pentecostal destiny he describes. The social networks as well as their life choices concerning family and career for single Christians such as Doubleday’s informants, as well as Precious and Danny, ‘church’ is a crucial spiritual and social resource.

There is not only one gendered identity for single men and women. Rather, we have to imagine the *gendering processes* of self-disciplined Pentecostal singles in the context of several co-existent discourses offering a variety of subject positions (Moore 1994: 58). The specific concerns and anxieties vary. Bob Connell’s (1997) notion of *multiple* masculinities and femininities is useful here, without necessarily one of them being dominant or hegemonic (Miescher 2005: 188). Looking at the particular rationales of people like Danny and Precious for their *investment* in particular Pentecostal subject positions (Moore 1994: 61-65) can reveal how people’s subject positions are influenced by Pentecostal morals. It shows their ideas about who they want to become and how they want to be seen by others (ibid.: 66).

In both a Pentecostal as well as a Yoruba context, moral judgement of behaviour and the advancement of one’s destiny are strongly shaped by gender. This is true in Nigeria and the UK and has historical dimensions: Peel (2000) argues that regulation of sexuality and the promotion of monogamous marriage were already at the heart of Victorian missionisation efforts in Nigeria (Peel 1983) and caused shifts in women’s agency (Cornwall 2001: 72). Similarly, the explosion of Pentecostalism in the 1990s is embedded in growing concerns about urban (pre- and extra-marital) sexuality (Bastian 2001a, Cornwall 1996, 2001, 2003 and Smith 2000, 2010). Since then, Pentecostal gender discourses in Nigeria are populated by immoral ‘wayward women’, ‘useless

men', 'jaguas', 'fertilizer girls', 'handbags', 'razor blades', etc.⁹⁹ and provide the backdrop in coining 'biblical' subjectivities and sexual relationships. Through their socialisation in the Nigeria of the 1990s, many of my interlocutors in London were strongly influenced by these discourses. Their parents were either strict Christians or themselves involved in extra-marital relationships. As they constructed the UK as morally deprived, they often applied strong Pentecostal standards in London very consciously.

In Nigeria as well as among Nigerians in Europe, it is largely assumed that everyone wants to belong to the "matrimonial class" (Bastian 2001a: 53).¹⁰⁰ The stage of 'singlehood' can last for many years from the age of around twenty to the age of thirty or even forty years. Nevertheless, it is constructed as a liminal phase in which men prepare to become husbands and women prepare to become wives.¹⁰¹ Nigerian Pentecostalism strongly influences how men and women relate to each other and (re)produces mutually exclusive but complementing categories of 'men' and 'women'. Supporting this understanding of 'naturally' different but relational genders, the body, its reproductive capacities and sexual urges are central concerns.

There is a growing body of literature on men in Africa (e.g. Morrell 2001, Miescher 2005) which demonstrates that "domesticity and sexuality are not and have not been exclusively women's issues" (Miescher and Lindsay 2003: 4). In agreement with Miescher and Lindsay, I use the term *masculinity* to refer to

(...) a cluster of norms, values, and behavioural patterns expressing explicit and implicit expectations of how men should act and represent themselves to others. Ideologies of masculinity – like those of femininity – are culturally and

⁹⁹ 'Wayward women' are disobedient married women who run after other men and their money. 'Useless men' are husbands who are unwilling or unable to 'provide' for families (Cornwall 2001: 67-68). The others are figures of unmarried females who are after men's money in exchange for sex; e.g. 'razor blades' bleed men of their money, 'jaguas' like men with expensive cars such as Jaguars etc. Many of these figures point to a strong implicit intersectionality of gender with class. See Bastian (2001a: 73-74, footnote 12 and 13); see also Cyprian Ekwensi's novel 'Jagua Nana' (1961).

¹⁰⁰ Bastian quotes a magazine that is published in Nigeria, but the idea of married people as a distinct (and higher) 'class' can also be applied to the London context.

¹⁰¹ The migration situation adds a further dimension to this liminality. For single Nigerian Pentecostals, the sense of having 'not yet arrived' at marriage resonates with a sense being in transitional stage in London (see also Doubleday 2008: 187).

historically constructed, their meanings continually contested and always in the process of being renegotiated in the context of existing power relations (2003: 4).

Cornwall's article (2003) illustrates such renegotiation of ideals around being a man in Southwest Nigeria at the beginning of the 1990s. At the height of economic crisis and political instability, men became economically and socially much more vulnerable. Instead of obedience, endurance and respect for elders they increasingly faced claims for love, money, sex and romance by women. Notions of masculinity as exercising control were increasingly complemented by the 'responsibility discourse' that we also encounter in churches such as the RCCG in London today.

As different as these two sets of ('controlling' and 'responsible') male subject positions may be, their role of 'providing for one's family' strongly persists in both. Many Londoner RCCG parishes emphasise the moral and social role of 'husbands' and 'fathers' and have vibrant men's groups to attract specifically men.¹⁰² Such groups are geared to actively shape Pentecostal notions of masculinity by "nurturing, encouraging and inspiring young men" into role models "of purpose, vision, action" (Doubleday 2008: 202-203). Danny's vision as a responsible future family man includes the ownership of several businesses in London and Lagos for the cash that a 'good life' for wife and children requires.

In London, such negotiations in the RCCG around male responsibility resonate strongly with a discourse about single motherhood and deprived children that are said to be more likely involved in gang activities. The RCCG in the city encourages both 'controlling' father-leaders, as well as 'responsible' caring masculinities to counterbalance subject positions of 'absent' runaway fathers, 'gangsters' or immoral 'sugar daddies' and 'womanizers'. Besides 'providing', men have got a spiritual role as "pastor and priest in the home set up" (Adesina 2008: 107). Whether 'strict' or 'loving', Pentecostal fathers and husbands gain authority through their humility as 'head servants' who do not abuse the power they 'naturally' have – strikingly similar to GO Adeboye. In RCCG practices

¹⁰² Jesus House publishes the men's magazine 'MMQ', but no equivalent for women. <http://themandate.org/mandate-mens-quarterly> [accessed 08-09-2011].

of worship, a certain amount of male emotionality is encouraged and visually displayed in pictures and video recordings. The Pentecostal understanding of ‘men’ usually equals them with married men and fathers. But unmarried male subjectivities have their own characteristics. Men like Danny tend to experience their singlehood as a phase of emotional and financial turmoil, social insecurities and moral dangers. They have the freedom, but also the burden, to relentlessly try and ‘make’ themselves, re-direct their destiny and take every opportunity to ‘go forward’ before they can slow down and settle into married life.

Whereas Pentecostal masculinity discourses centre around ‘leadership’ and ‘responsibility’, Pentecostal femininities evolve around concepts of ‘moderation’, endurance and ‘submission’. In Nigeria, “traditional values” as well as “modern political culture” assume that the main field of women is the home - in the roles of a wife and mother – marked by a public invisibility and de-politicisation (Adeboye 2005a: 147). Like the *arere* tree which omits an offensive smell, uncontrollable and outspoken women belong far from human settlements (Kolawole 2004). Such ‘Nigerian’ perceptions of female endurance as a desirable female trait are echoed but simultaneously challenged in a Pentecostal RCCG environment.

‘Moderation’ is an act of faith and often identified as key trait at all-women’s events in the RCCG in the UK as much as in Nigeria. The following mass text message was sent to my phone by a female Tower of God member:

A Poem For Us ladies, Someone will always be prettier. Someone will always be smarter. Some of their houses will be bigger. Some will drive a better car. Their children will do better in school. And their husband will fix more things around the house. So let it go, and love you and your circumstances. Think about it! The prettiest woman in the world can have hell in her heart. The most highly favoured woman on your job may be unable to have children. The richest woman you know, she’s got the car, house, the clothes – might be lonely. So, LOVE who you are. Look in the mirror in the morning & smile and say “I am too Blessed to b Stressed and too Anointed, 2 b Disappointed!” WINNERS make things happen – LOSERS let things happen. ‘B’Blessed’ Ladies and pass

this on to encourage another woman.' To the world you might b one person, to me you are special. Thanks alot 4 everything.¹⁰³

Compared with the literature on femininity in Nigeria, the notion of female submission seems to be somewhat more flexible and liberal in Pentecostal Nigerian London. Singlehood is often a phase of greater freedom for women than they would have in Nigeria - Precious can stay with friends rather than relatives. However, getting married at some point is still a must. Hence a single female subjectivity is also marked by the great anxiety as to whether someone they like will want to marry them. Oluwa, the legal advisor at Jesus House, is a very ambitious woman and dreams of going into politics. She came to the UK to pursue her studies in law when strikes at her Nigerian university made it difficult for her to graduate there. In the UK she met her husband and they got married. She experiences her subject position as a wife, and a mother of two children (rather than a woman in her own right) as an enormous limitation to her freedom and choices. Nevertheless, she is convinced that God wants women to marry.

[W]hen I got married, I think compared to my peers I got married quite young, I think I was about twenty-five when I got married, yeah, twenty-five. And I wasn't ... left to me, I didn't really want to get married that young. But I knew that God wanted me to get married then and I knew that, that was clear, so I just kind of obeyed. Now, down line, seven and a half or eight years down the line, I now know why God wanted me to get married. If I didn't get married then, and I had waited till now, I would never get married (laughs). (...) I think if had waited longer, I would have said 'oh God, my life is good, I don't want to complicate it' and just live life, but then gotten almost to sixty and wished I had. So for me personally, I think God just knew what was lying ahead of me... because I was quite idealistic – you know as everybody is about marriage – how all would work out.¹⁰⁴

But within the framework of submission, women are also encouraged to aspire to self-betterment. In her book *The Supernatural Woman*, the Londoner RCCG Pastor Olayemi Adeleke (2007) retains more conservative values of femininity, but simultaneously seems to be influenced by feminist/womanist theology. Carefully balancing moderation

¹⁰³ Received 09-02-2011; all spelling irregularities in original.

¹⁰⁴ Interview, 23-11-2008.

with public visibility and importance, she describes the ideal Pentecostal ('supernatural') woman as "crucifying the flesh daily" (ibid: 6), but also as "relevant" (ibid: 16), "excelling", "winning" (ibid: 8) and "empowered" (ibid: 17). The "fruit of the Holy Spirit" for a Pentecostal woman is the capacity to exercise love, be long-suffering, and have gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness - after 1 Corinthians 12: 18 – 20 (ibid: 17). With the Holy Spirit, a Pentecostal woman has to overcome her 'natural' negative traits, such as selfishness, impatience, weakness, stress and being the "noise makers" (ibid: 46). Adeleke's description assumes that 'the' woman is married to a man. But her distinction between the "worldly", "natural" and "supernatural" woman provides a hierarchy, a ladder that every woman can aspire in the same way that men aspire to be a 'big man'. Through the Holy Ghost, women are empowered to aspire within a framework of marriage: "[r]emember you make your choices, and your choices make you" (ibid: 9).

Body, Sexuality, Dress

In my research, views on the gendered body, its surface and its sexuality seemed strikingly consensual among the RCCG members in London. Men were constructed as 'naturally' influenced by their sexual urge, women by their desire for material wealth. Here, Pentecostal discourses are shaped by the strong West African tropes that I have described above and that exceed the Christian environment by far. Many of my informants in the UK and in Nigeria are convinced that this gender constellation tends to lead to men using their possessions to get sex and women using their bodies to get money or gifts.¹⁰⁵

The perceived bodily interdependence of men and women comes with the dangers of unwanted children, the use of magic and emotional pain. These are addressed in Jesus House's Pastor Agu's book *Sex, Lies and Your Soul*, where he states that "[a]ny sexual desires that are not directed towards or about your spouse (husband or wife) are ungodly; and would be termed sexually immoral" (Irukwu 2004: 60). He emphasises at

¹⁰⁵ See Smith (2010) for the phenomenon of the 'sugar daddy' in Nigeria.

a marriage conference¹⁰⁶ that sexual drive is a good thing, but must (only) be directed towards enhancing unity in marriage. Within a heterosexual monogamous Christian marriage, exchanges of sex and money ideally occur voluntarily, with pleasure, and without abuse of power; they are supposed to be fruitful – advancing the family unit towards multiplication of members and material well-being.

Clothes play a particular role in signifying what gender one is as well as what *kind* of man or woman. “As material culture, clothing is not seen as simply reflecting given aspects of the self but, through its particular material propensities, is co-constitutive of facets such as identity, sexuality and social role” (Woodward 2005: 21). This flexibility allows for an ability to embody multiple meanings, multiple contexts and multiple modes of reading. Yoruba Londoner women “fashion their individuality” (Botticello 2009b); their dress “indicates one’s gender, identity, character, wealth and status” and simultaneously “determine[s] and negotiate[s] social relationships” (ibid.: 136). In Botticello’s context, a birthday party was the event at which these dynamics came to the forefront, but dress practices and the underlying perceptions of the body are just as important to make a moral and social self in church and indeed everyday Christian life (see Illustration 6). This as well as Doubleday’s example of his well-dressed but poor male informant above indicate that investment in and display of particular kinds of clothing are relevant financially, socially and morally.

¹⁰⁶ Held at Jesus House. Fieldnotes, 11-10-2008.



Illustration 6: Female RCCG members

helping each other with their festive head ties at a wedding reception in London.

In modes of dressing, both, (men's) money as well as (women's) sexuality are discussed. Clothes are a commodity with a certain material value, but they also cover (or expose) the sexualised body. In holiness-oriented churches in Nigeria such as the early RCCG under Akindayomi or today's Deeper Life, jewellery, expensive colourful clothes and other material possessions are frowned upon. Morally appropriate ways of gendered dressing have also been extensively discussed in relation to Islam. For the Muslim North of Nigeria, Mahdi (2008) shows that shifts in notions of pious dressing does not necessarily imply a growing 'oppression' of women, but rather more generally a change in gender relations: "[T]he changes in veiling style indicate a renegotiation (...). The *hijab* might indicate women's persistence of pursuing their right to be in the public space" (Mahdi 2008: 8).¹⁰⁷ With the rise of the prosperity message and its possibility of legitimately obtained wealth in Nigeria's South since the 1990s, the meaning of moderation in dress has shifted. Now, what is more monitored is *how* such wealth and material beauty is worn, especially with regard to male and female sexuality.

¹⁰⁷ See also Mahmood (2005) on relations between veiling, piety and gendered agency.

In the RCCG's discourses and practices around 'moderate dress', it is assumed that the exposure of skin and feminine body shapes 'naturally' arouses male onlookers.¹⁰⁸ The wardrobes of my research participants – both in Nigeria and London - contain a wide selection of different styles (such as clothes made to measure from African prints, wrapper and blouse dresses (called *iro* and *buba*) made from Yoruba 'lace' and 'Western' style clothes), all in sexy, casual or formal versions, cheap or expensive, in many colours, always neat and often in sets, or matching with head ties, scarves, make-up, shoes and handbags.¹⁰⁹ Given the availability of choice, it is the selection process of what to wear for a particular occasion that is crucial to avoid 'unnecessary' sexual temptation.

'Moderate' dressing practices are an issue for both men and women as well as for married and unmarried RCCG members. Neat and new looking clothes are seen as appropriate. Men are expected to wear their hair short, be clean shaven and avoid symbols that are typical for 'un-Christian' subcultures such as tattoos, earrings, dread locks, hooded jumpers etc. The main focus, however, is on women and includes clothes, jewellery and make-up. They are expected to make it their responsibility to 'help' men to abstain from 'sexual sins' by 'covering up' body parts such as thighs, shoulders and cleavage. Here, unmarried women are specially scrutinised in order to protect others and themselves from their potential sexualised impact. In London young women are often perceived as deliberately going to extremes in their outfits, making use of being less monitored by relatives than in Nigeria and of not yet having a husband who can prevent them from 'showing what only a husband should see'. They are feared to 'snatch' married men and/or the money that is supposed to benefit their wives. Another concern is that they may attract the wrong 'type' of marriage candidates: men who may even pretend to be Christians, but who will turn out to be irresponsible and just after sex. Moderation in dress is reinforced in church, often by female religious authorities. In Tower of God, a deaconess once told an unmarried female member off for wearing underpants that showed through her white linen trousers as she was bending down to sweep the podium. However, the negotiation of moderate dressing also bears the potential of shaking up RCCG power relations in London-Lagos. A few years back,

¹⁰⁹ Clothes are often given as gifts by husbands, and friends may borrow each others' outfits.

there was outrage among particularly holiness-oriented RCCG women in Nigeria, involving an accusation directed against the Overseer's wife of wearing lipstick on a photograph. This picture was dispatched around the whole world as the RCCG's Christmas greeting card. Although Mummy GO assured her female followers that she had only used Vaseline, and only because her lips looked dry from the harmattan weather, the matter could only be settled by Folu Adeboye's public apology at a women's gathering in Redemption Camp.¹¹⁰

Self-Discipline

To support the sexual and material ethics described above, Pentecostal practice is geared towards the (self-) discipline of these desires of men and women. Especially for singles, the sexual urge does not have a morally appropriate outlet and needs to be disciplined, even though this is thought to be notoriously difficult to achieve. As we were walking down the Old Kent Road one Sunday, Danny told me that one of his moral 'weaknesses' are his sexual desires and fantasies. When they plague him too much, he goes for a run in the streets to get rid of them. His sexuality, however, is only one aspect of Danny's strong concern with self-discipline as a spiritual practice. He tries to get up early, prays several times a day, fasts regularly, works hard, attends or even assists in all church events. Marshall notes that narratives about self-discipline, such as Danny's on our walk, are a central Pentecostal technique to constitute a moral self by "giving an account of the self" (2009: 154, referring to Butler 2001). The interview sequence below illustrates the ongoing self-scrutiny this demands in order to control ones 'inner enemy' (see Illustration 7).

¹¹⁰ Account of female RCCG member in Nigeria. She thought it concerned the Christmas card for Christmas 2007, but could not remember exactly. I was unable to verify this further. Fieldnotes, 24-01-2009.

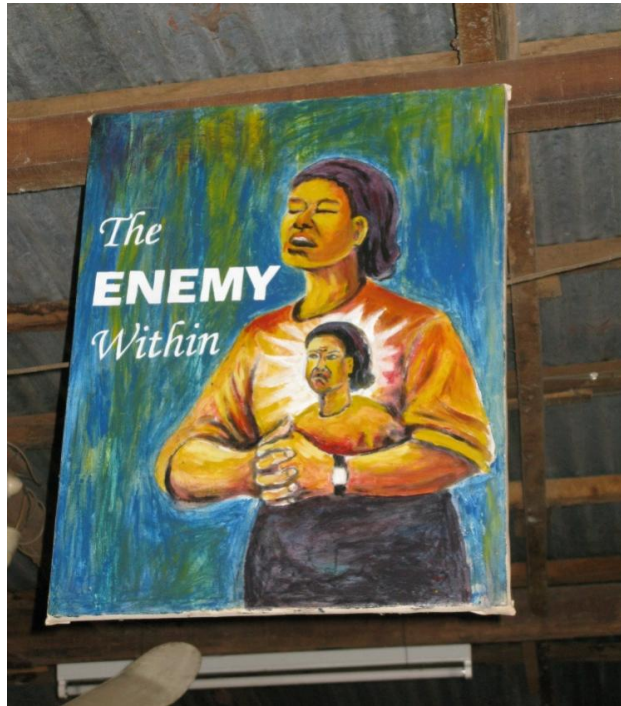


Illustration 7: Poster 'the enemy within'.

Seen in auditorium of holiness-oriented Deeper Life Church in Ile-Ife, Nigeria.

Danny: But for me, I am not a ... I won't say I am as perfect as Pastor [Olawale]. I still make some funny, funny mistakes. Say some certain things that I am not supposed to be saying. Make all kinds of... No! There are so many things that I do, that is not... Christian.

Katrin: But what do you do then... I mean when you think you made a mistake?

Danny: I can ... for example, I can say, for example, I see a fine lady, a fine girl going, and I say 'Mmh, fine girl!' ... for me it's not... Or 'fine girl', err... some nasty, sexy things, that you're not supposed to come out with. Or cursing, or doing some lying. You understand?

Katrin: Yes.

Danny: But... not that I want to lie. But it just comes out, unconsciously. After I realise I have lied: 'God, forgive me!' All those things are not really part of me. I am not supposed to lie. For almost two months now I have been watching myself. I have not been lying. I think I am getting over it. (...)

Katrin: So you watch yourself?

Danny: Yes, I watch myself, I notice myself, even the way I sleep, I watch the way I sleep. (...) I hate it when I snore.

Katrin: But is there anything in the Bible that snoring is ...?

Danny: No!! It's not in the Bible. It's irritating! The sound! (laughs) I hate it when I do it. Let me talk of somebody doing this beside me. I don't really like it, when he do it beside me. But he do it... There is a friend of mine, by the time he was snoring, I thought he was choking. I need to go and wake him up because ... It was horrible that day. I said 'are you ok?' And I thought he was choking. I need to wake him up that day. I said 'Look at you, you are doing as if you are choking on the throat!' And he said 'Ah! sorry' And he has to face properly, turn round. But if I face... For almost two weeks now, I have not been snoring. I do watch myself.

Katrin: So you watch yourself in everything?

Danny: Not in everything. Not in everything. You can't watch yourself in everything. The only thing I would say I watch myself is the way dress, the way I talk, ...

Katrin: Yes, you dress always very ...

Danny: Simple.

Katrin: Simple? I was going to say: smart.

Danny: And smart. I dress always smart. (...) And I watch the way I eat. There are some people, when they eat, they eat with their mouth open, like [smacks his lips]. You will be hearing the sound of their mouth. Me, I eat easily, I chew easily. 'Watch what you do!'¹¹¹

Male and female Nigerian Christian singles in London try to focus on their professional life or studies and on church activities to keep them busy and out of sin (as well as to cover high bills and to support their relatives 'back home'). They carefully choose the people they spend time with. The closest friendships that single interviewees had were with fellow Christians and people of the same sex. Mojisola is a feisty unmarried young woman. I was introduced to her by the brother of a Tower of God member who is her work colleague. She is a born-again Christian herself and was raised in the Pentecostal Christ Apostolic Church (CAC). She is a 'Lagosian' Yoruba and grew up there until she came to London for an IT course. She lives with her aunt in Croydon, but works in Deptford in a Nigerian-run shop where she is responsible for international money

¹¹¹ Interview, 19-05-2009.

transfers. She gets on much better with her male friends, as she is not interested in fashion and other “girl’s stuff”. Her aunt and other relatives suspect that such mixed gender friendships involve sexual activity. Mojisola is disappointed by the lack of trust from her aunt and assures me that she watches herself and that there is “nothing going on”.¹¹² She is looking forward to getting married because she will be able to get away from the control of her relatives.

Shame and Pressure

All unmarried people between their early twenties and their late thirties I have spoken to looked forward to ending the phase of singlehood in their life. They felt that this was a phase where they were not recognised as full adults, often experienced financial and emotional uncertainty and were under pressure of expectations from relatives in the UK and Nigeria. The older the interlocutors, the more anxious they were about finding a spouse soon. Women in their early thirties and above were under the biggest (internal and external) pressure. Single male interviewees tended to be much less worried until they were in their late thirties or forties. Their main issue was their financial situation: it is expensive to get married and to ‘provide’ for a family.

Oluwa: (...) a lot of single women, Nigerian women, are looking to get married. As in, that’s their focus. (...) And you can’t blame them, because a lot of the culture has ...particularly for women. If a man is 40 and he isn’t married, or 45, nobody says much. But if a woman is forty-five and not married...

Katrin: They pity her...?

Oluwa: Yeah, or they start praying for her. Which is not really helpful for the person. And so you find a whole lot... a number of people who marry not out of love, but just to fulfil... just to tick that box. Yeah, that happens. Or in the case of maybe non-Christians in Nigeria, they will probably go and marry somebody – because in Nigeria there is no law against marrying more than one wife, so ... – who already has a wife and family somewhere. A woman would marry him

¹¹² Interview, 29-05-2009. Same-sex friendships, such as between Precious and Sarah, or Danny and Adekunle, can go as far as involving sharing a flat, a room, a bed even, clothes, financial burdens and other worries, household tasks and personal information. After marriage however, these friendships are expected to change and become a second priority to the spousal relationship.

just so she can say ‘that man is my husband’. That happens a lot in Nigeria. The pressure is culture, definitely. (...) Married women are more respected, because it’s just, ...err, yeah. It’s like an unwritten rule. They are more respected than unmarried people.¹¹³

There were arguments against getting married ‘too’ early for women, as they expect to be in charge of the household, have children soon after the wedding, interrupt their careers and adapt to their husband’s plans. But women also wanted to make sure they *will* get married at some point and were afraid of being less able to bear children after their mid-thirties. Such concerns strongly resonate with the results of Koster-Oyekan’s study about fertility and family planning in Lagos (1999), which revealed that women often preferred to have (illegalised) terminations of undesired pregnancies rather than using contraception. Like this, they were at least sure they can conceive. For female RCCG members in London, the period after finishing their first degree of Higher Education Studies is considered an ideal time to get married, and women like Precious often have a fiancé ‘waiting’. In the Youth Group for Tower of God’s single men and women there are hardly any attendants in their late thirties and above. Deacon Gideon is the spiritual leader and advisor of the Youth Group. He is married to Lizzy who is Igbo like him. They have got two children. They know each other from the church they attended in Eastern Nigeria where Gideon was also engaged in youth work. Gideon lived in Ireland before coming to London. Now, he works night shifts as a security guard. When I asked Gideon about the low attendance of the Youth Group, he attributed this to the shame they feel because of their situation. Their attendance would highlight their unmarried situation further.¹¹⁴ Frank is a Lagos-born and bred *easy jet* air pilot in his mid-thirties and a Youth Group member. He reckons that older singles feel like they have a disease.¹¹⁵ Luckily, he himself does not need to worry: at the time of the interview his own wedding is only a few weeks away.

¹¹³ Interview, 23-11-2008.

¹¹⁴ Interview, 26-04-2009.

¹¹⁵ Similarly, at a Singles’ Conference, unmarried people were compared to lepers. Fieldnotes, 08-11-2008.

How to Find a Spouse

Despite the stigma of being ‘old’ and unmarried, it is not seen as advisable to rush into a marriage. Watchful scrutiny must be applied by single men and women in order to find a spouse. A ‘bachelor’ or ‘spinster’ needs to learn to read the ‘signs’ in their life to figure out the right person and moment to marry. A lot is at stake in this process, as divorce is spiritually and socially not considered an option. Thus a marriage and partner shapes the direction and achievements of one’s life – one’s emotional and spiritual, familial and material success, one’s whole ‘destiny’. If one is not careful to take the right spiritual measures in the decision to marry, it can potentially cost one’s ‘happiness’. Rachel is an active member and a deaconess in Tower of God. After her mother’s early death she stayed with different family members, had to contribute financially by hawking goods and was not always treated well. As a young woman, she trained as a nurse and midwife in Ibadan and Lagos. She got married and came to London ten years earlier to join her husband with their first-born baby. Now they have got three children and live a stone’s throw away from the church. She has long come to terms with her past choices, but before marrying her husband, she was engaged to a man she truly loved. He “taught me a lot of things that I was willing to learn, it felt safe, like my brother, he wouldn’t let anything touch me. Not being over-protective, not in a jealous way, no. He wouldn’t let anything harm me.” She broke off the engagement shortly before their wedding, because they found out that the combination of their genes made it likely that their future children would be born with sickle cell anaemia. In the interview she said that, looking back, she regrets having given up this relationship. “He [her then fiancé] said: ‘Let’s do it, let’s do it, by faith’. I [Rachel] said, ‘I don’t have that strong enough faith’. (...) If it had been now, yes, I would have gone into it with faith, because he was my soul mate.”¹¹⁶

The RCCG’s position towards singlehood in personal advice, literature and sermons clearly perpetuates the necessity to get married.¹¹⁷ However, the RCCG also helps to manage uncertainty, shame and ‘cultural’ pressure from relatives. They firstly promote

¹¹⁶ Interview, 21-05-2009.

¹¹⁷ Celibacy (e.g. among Catholic priests) is often criticised as promoting illegitimate practices such as masturbation, homosexuality and paedophilia.

a more positive notion of the period before marriage. Unmarried people are encouraged to use the spare time they have to get more involved in their parish's activities or initiate new projects to use and develop their skills 'to the glory of God'. Married members and ministers tend to point out how busy they will be as husbands and wives and that singlehood is the period where they are 'free' to serve God most intensely and thus build their faith and invest spiritually in themselves and their destinies. Secondly, the RCCG deflates the notion of singlehood as a 'race against time'. Statements such as "you cannot rush God" to reveal His choice of spouse complicate the search for a marriage partner, because they throw the single person back onto the search for vague divine 'signs'. But it also eases the desperation one may experience when moving into one's late thirties and beyond without prospects of getting married.

Thirdly, the RCCG in London offers clear practical steps towards finding a Christian partner – ideally in church or church-related singles' events under the watchful eyes of spiritually mature persons. RCCG pastor Adesina describes the basic strategy to seek 'God's guidance' for his own case in his book. When he was "tired of being a bachelor", he "sought the face of the Lord in fasting and prayer". Due to divine directions, he escaped the manipulative and dominating woman he was going to marry at first, only to then find the woman he is still happily married to (2008: 17). Practices such as reading the Bible, prayer, fasting and doing work for God are crucial to communicate with Him, to identify and to remove 'spiritual obstacles' through prayers or 'deliverance'. People self-assess their situations and intensify spiritual practices according to need. Though there is no explicit rule, the RCCG seems to support single men approaching a woman, rather than the other way round. Both, approaching men and approached women are encouraged to contact the pastor of their parish at an early stage to be questioned about their intentions and feelings and for yet more prayers. Sometimes the pastor acts as a matchmaker and advises the individual or couple of how to continue in accordance with the Bible.

The way and the degree to which the individual RCCG singles I spoke to apply these church guidelines, especially the point in time when they involve church authorities,

depends on their personal considerations.¹¹⁸ They tend to rely on their ‘personal relationship with Jesus’ in prayers and visions for spiritual directions towards a specific spouse. Many young people say that such factors should not matter, but individual preference of, say, a particular look or nationality seems to be influential, too.¹¹⁹ Virtually all my interlocutors hope to marry a Christian, but are happy to wed a ‘believer’ attending a church other than the RCCG. I do not know how many may end up marrying a ‘non-believer’, but know of three couples where the husband only started to go to church during their courtship. Single born-again of both genders usually involve prayers in their search for a marriage partner. Both want their future spouse to be their ‘best friend’, trustworthy and loyal. However, pragmatic considerations among research participants differ with their gender. Among the criteria that women have for their future spouse were: be hard working, have good taste, be sensitive and loving. Whether love or money is more important is controversial – but both are desired to provide security in a marriage. Men most often mention that they want their future wife to be supportive and sexually faithful, homely, humble and/or educated. Whether good looks (e.g. pretty face, big breasts) or ‘inner beauty’ are more important is debatable.

In terms of actual advances, women often feel they have to (or want to) wait until a man approaches them first. Nevertheless, they do not perceive themselves as passive. Even though she is only in her early twenties, Mojisola, the girl who works in Deptford had developed a whole catalogue of qualities she wanted her future husband to have, ranging from his looks and nationality to the way he interacted with children.¹²⁰ On this basis, women can assess single men (e.g. in church or at a party) and actively decide how they are going to respond should they make advances. Some women said they send ‘signals’ (e.g. through eye contact) that encourage a man of their choice to make the first move. Women also take indirect but active measures through spiritual practices.

¹¹⁸ Furthermore, intense involvement of pastors may occur more among RCCG members in Nigeria than in the UK, judging from interviews with pastors in both countries.

¹¹⁹ Although I do not have any reliable material to confirm this on a broader level, among single people in Tower of God there seems to be a strong preference for fellow Nigerian-socialised spouses, usually even from the same ethnic group.

¹²⁰ She intended to marry a ‘fellow Nigerian’ as she expected such a man to share her aspiration for ‘African’ gender roles in a marriage. Interview, 29-05-2009.

At an RCCG-dominated women's conference,¹²¹ a woman in her early thirties takes the microphone: Maggie is still single and no man seems interested in her. She attributes this to her “manly” looks and behaviour. She asks us to pray for her marital future. Later I tell her that I thought she had been brave to speak out so openly. She replies that actually, she had already identified the devil's doings as the reason behind her looks, behaviour and incapacity to find a spouse. Her public appearance was intended to demonstrate to the devil her alertness and willingness to fight him for her future. She points at her huge hooped earrings as a proof that she is already engaged in the process to recover her femininity and desirability as a wife.

To men more crucial than abstract criteria seems to be the first visual impression, echoing a romantic ideal of ‘love at first sight’. Sarah, with whom Precious shares a flat, got married to James during my fieldwork. James works in the care sector even though he is a university graduate. Sarah works for a company that re-fills snack and coffee machines. They come from the Delta Region in Nigeria and have been in the UK for a few years. When I interview them, James remembers that he had inquired with mutual friends about Sarah immediately when he first saw her at a birthday party.¹²² It is vital that men are alert at all times and react promptly. The following example illustrates this. Tunde is the younger brother of Tower of God member Femi. Tunde himself attends a different church, but is also a born-again Christian. At the time of my interview with Tunde, Femi provisionally stayed with Tunde in his room in a shared council flat near Elephant and Castle. Tunde recalls how he almost missed a chance to get to know a woman because of being absent-minded:

I was waiting at a bus stop and a lady just came. She said, ‘oh, do you live around here?’ I said ‘no’. That very day I wasn’t myself at all; already, I was kind of being moody that very day. So I said ‘no’. [She said:] ‘Where are you going?’ ‘err, Monument [tube station]’... You know I was just trying to be very brief, when she was talking to me I was trying to be very brief, cut her short, cut her short. And when, you know ...on a good day the way she talked to me, I should have (...) turned it around, made the most of the opportunity. But because I wasn’t in the mood to go for that, I’d got something in my mind I’m thinking

¹²¹ ‘Total Women Ministry’ Conference, Fieldnotes, 02-07-2008 to 06-07-2008.

¹²² Group interview with James, his new wife Sarah and their friend Precious, 06-02-2010. All three were Tower of God members at the time of the interview.

about. I said ‘oh, that is my bus coming’. ‘But I do worship down there, in that church.’ You know, she told me that. And: ‘whenever you feel like just bump in, I’d like to see your face again’. And as she said that, she was just leaving (laughs). Then I realised what happened, somebody just gave me an invitation to be a friend. And I didn’t even care to take it or something like that. She showed me the church before she left. So I should just pop into that church one of these Sundays, and say ‘do you know my face? This is the person, here I am, I’m here because of you’, as simple as that.¹²³

The example indicates that the process of finding a spouse can take years of search, advancement, disappointment and retrials. Over the past years, Danny had met several women he considered or even proposed to, including one lady whom he was with for three years before she split up with him. Another lady whom he was interested in got pregnant by another man instead of waiting to get married to Danny.¹²⁴

When the gendered strategies of ‘sending signals’ and ‘always being ready to take the first step’ have resulted in ‘finding’ someone, the even more tricky decision making process starts. When Frank, the air pilot, approached Bola, whom he remotely knew from his teenage years in Lagos, Bola’s prayers involved her mother in Nigeria through the phone. After some weeks, both mother and daughter independently ‘heard from God’ that he was her future husband and she agreed to enter ‘courtship’.¹²⁵ Danny claims that even before he found out that his potential wife was pregnant by another man, God showed him that she was not the right woman for him. In a dream, Danny and the girl entered a bus on the busy bus route 53 to Woolwich in Southeast London (a bus that Danny often takes). The bus stopped on the way, because another bus had overheated and caused a traffic jam.¹²⁶ While they were waiting to continue, the woman got off and left him behind.¹²⁷ In addition to praying for divine confirmation, and getting to know the other in face-to-face meetings, most men and women also stated that they mobilize their social networks to ‘study’ the other person. This can include

¹²³ Interview 19-05-2009.

¹²⁴ Fieldnotes, 26-04-2009.

¹²⁵ Fieldnotes, 20-08-2009.

¹²⁶ Note that this dream is set in ‘London-Lagos’: the bus ride takes place in London, but the scenario of overheating and traffic jam is a strong reminder of conditions in Lagos.

¹²⁷ ‘Hearing from God’ is a controversial topic. All my interviewees believed that God does speak to humans, but emphasises that this can take the form of an ‘inner conviction’ and does not necessarily occur in explicit dreams (e.g. Tower of God’s Gideon, interview, 26-04-2009; or Jesus House’s Oluwa, interview, 23-11-2008). See also Luhrmann (2007).

information about his/her personal past and habits, but also more generally about their family. When Sarah told her family in Nigeria about her intentions with James, they ‘spied’ on his relatives ‘back home’ to make sure he comes from a good family.¹²⁸

At this point at the latest, the RCCG in Nigeria as well as in London expects the couple to involve the pastor for advice and monitoring. In courtship, sexual intercourse is still prohibited by the church. The couple can spend time together, but they are advised to not stay at each other’s place over night. Vague comments in interviews suggest that the point in time when a couple starts having sex may be more flexible than the church doctrine suggests. Several women I interviewed seemed to have given birth less than nine months after the wedding which may suggest that they had already conceived before the actual ceremony. When he was put under pressure by the woman he loved, one man considered to agree to have sex immediately, only based on his trust that she will marry him later. For such reasons, most pastors I spoke to recommend not to extend this phase for longer than a year. If a couple wants to get married in an RCCG parish, they must complete a ‘marriage class’ beforehand. This is a series of meetings with the parish pastor where they learn about Pentecostal Christian ways of living a married life. When a date for their wedding was set, Pastor Olawale asked Precious’s friend Sarah to stand up in a Sunday Service so she could be seen by the congregation. Then, he announced publicly that she was no longer ‘available’. She gave us a beaming smile - this was a triumphant moment for her.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have described the ways in which the social form of marriage is promoted in the RCCG. I have particularly highlighted the practical challenges around bodily forms of moderation and shame that single men and women experience. I have then looked at forms of self-discipline to manage the ambivalent role of sexuality and other insecurities. Finally, I have sketched out the practical steps that the church suggests and that unmarried RCCG members take to find the ‘right’ spouse as well as

¹²⁸ Group interview with James, Sarah and Precious, 06-02-2010.

the pathways to the actual wedding ceremony. The next chapter discusses the married life of RCCG members and the negotiations, conflicts and solutions it demands where divorce is not considered an option. Marriage relations are discussed and arranged around gendered forms of responsibility and submission. Like self-discipline, these forms echo wider issues of participation and authority in the RCCG.

Chapter Six

“Wives Submit to Your Husbands...”

On a usual Saturday in Tower of God, a dozen or so volunteers clean, prepare the Sunday School lesson, print the weekly distributed bulletin and rehearse drama contributions. Today, though, an excited buzz is in the air: Sarah is getting married to James. Sarah is a popular, long-standing church member, active in several departments. She has passed her mid thirties and ‘finally’ found a suitable partner. The staircase wall is lined with pictures that the church’s children have drawn for the couple. In one such picture, a child quotes the famous scripture “Wives Submit To Your Husbands (...) For The Husband Is The Head Of The Wife (...) Ephesians Chapter 5: Verse 22” Underneath, the young artist has written in huge letters: “Be Happy”. And in the right bottom corner are three love hearts that say ‘Sarah’, ‘James’ and ‘Love’. The decorated auditorium is full of men in suits, boys with fresh haircuts, girls in frilly dresses and women with enormous head ties. Most are the couples’ friends, colleagues and the family members that are based in the UK.¹²⁹ But many of Tower of God’s regular members have also come, to ‘send her off’ – after the wedding she is expected to attend her husband’s church.¹³⁰ Guided by the choir team, we have been immersed in singing and dancing for an hour when the couple comes in and joins in praising God. Then, Pastor Olawale guides Sarah and James through the vows that are spoken into microphones. The kiss follows accompanied by flash lights from cameras and cheerful shouts from the congregation. Then, Olawale invites all ministers who are present to come to the front and pray for the new couple. About fifteen men and women form a

¹²⁹ Some couples get married in Nigeria to be able to celebrate with their families.

¹³⁰ In London, individual practices vary. James and Sarah agreed for Sarah to stay in Tower of God after the wedding, where James increasingly joined her for services. Rosemary and Kunmi both left their respective churches and joined Jesus House which they had selected together (Interview, 25-07-2009).

tight circle around the couple. They stand very close together, and in some places they are staggered into two rows; while their words and concentration focus towards Sarah and James in the middle, their backs face outwards, creating the impression of human shields. The couple kneel on the step that leads up to the podium. The prophecies, positive declarations and utterances in tongues fill the space within the circle, creating a protected bubble of blessing and presence of the Holy Spirit. The ministers' eyes are closed, their faces showing strain and seriousness and their arms and hands underlining the sound of their voices with gestures of forceful pointing and throwing towards the centre of the circle. Though not electronically amplified, the ministers' rhythmical screaming fills the whole auditorium. Some members of the audience contribute quieter prayers of well-wishing from where they sit, their hands stretched forwards towards the circle (see Illustration 8). However, most guests do not actively engage with the activities in the front. During the ten minutes that the prayers last, the audience becomes an increasingly separate space: children in the audience get distracted and start playing. Adults start talking to each other, and one woman adjusts another's clothes to cover her bra strap. Olawale ends the spiritual intermezzo and demands the audience's attention through a microphone. He delivers a short exhortation before the whole congregation is invited to join the couple for celebrations at the reception nearby.



Illustration 8: Male RCCG members praying
for the couple at a wedding ceremony in Southeast London.

Weddings such as Sarah and James's mark perhaps the most important transition in Pentecostal Nigerians' life. Marriage and married life is at the heart of Pentecostal moral concerns and thus the topic of many sermons, books and conversations in the RCCG.¹³¹ The instance of the prayer circle illustrates that married couples like Sarah and James are constituted as one self-sufficient unit. The 'fervent' prayers of the ministers indicate the potential spiritual danger from a distinct 'outside' and provide protection with their bodies. The usual aesthetic and performative considerations are dropped - the prayers are not amplified, it is hard to film or photograph the scene and the audience's involvement becomes irrelevant. This underlines the extraordinary importance of the act. Conflicts of authority are one way in which spiritual attacks on marriages are perceived to occur. The child's picture that decorates the church on Sarah's wedding day in the vignette above expresses that female submission is an important key to marital love and happiness. Like authority in the RCCG more generally (see Chapter Four), the merging of marriage units is impacted by contradictions between loyal obedience on one side and power, agency and participation on the other. This chapter assesses the negotiation of ideals of 'submitting' wives, 'loving' husbands and united couples. It also looks at the conflicts that occur due to shifts in the meaning of 'female submission' as well as envisaged resolution strategies.

Marriages Under Attack

In relation to Nigeria, Newell embeds this Pentecostal preoccupation with marriage in the wider need to reshape family relations in a postcolonial setting of power relations and oppression of the individual in West Africa. In this reading, marriage discourses can be seen as a contribution towards solving a perceived moral chaos and to maintaining the family as a religious and social unit (2005: 307). Marriage then becomes a more general, "complex, over-determined space in which social and political tensions, and shifts in gender relations, are negotiated at a dynamic, inter-subjective level" (Newell

¹³¹ The importance of Christian marriage for one's social status can be traced to colonial times (Mann 1985).

2005: 308). This explains why Pentecostal marriage relationships are constructed as crucially important but fragile and under social and spiritual threat.

In London, the special divine protection that the couple needs is provided not least by a certain discursive and practical insulation of the Pentecostal nuclear family unit. The happiness in the marriage depends on the spiritual maturity of the husband and wife and is facilitated by the church as in the prayers in the example above. In the RCCG (as in other Christian churches), marriage relationships are seen simultaneously as social and spiritual units. Marriage relationships are not merely the basis of support for the individual in his/her daily endeavours, the foundation of nuclear families and of society at large, they are also divinely instituted and the smallest unit of the church. The nuclear family, a married couple and their children, are seen as the ‘bedrock of society’¹³² – a society inspired by Christianity. As a bridge between church and society, marriages are of key importance for the Pentecostal outreach project of the conversion of the world. They are however also in a particularly vulnerable situation for spiritual attacks from this immoral and dangerous world. It is hence not surprising that many of the moral discourses, rituals and other practices in the RCCG are centred around marital sexuality and material and biological reproduction.

Prayers are crucial for such spiritual protection. After the prayer circle described above, further prayers were given by individual pastors and ministers in a more usual format, which addressed both couple and audience. After such a wedding there will be church prayers for the couple at every subsequent wedding anniversary. The pastor, ministers and friends will occasionally ‘hold them in prayers’ on individual initiative, and furthermore the couple is responsible for developing their own spiritual life among themselves. However, the difficulties that many young adults expect to encounter in marriage do not prevent Nigerian Pentecostals wanting to ‘tie the knot’.

The wedding ceremony in church and the party afterwards mark the transition into a new status and a new period of life a life where the couple are recognised as responsible adults, can have children and engage in legitimate sex. It sometimes may also solve

¹³² Dami Oludoyin, a Lagos born-and-bred man in his thirties; at the time of our interview he was in charge of the Communications Team in Jesus House, 02-11-2008.

practical matters such as pacifying a family back home in Nigeria with particularly strong expectations, or settling immigration issues in the UK. The wedding party is often glamorous and costs a lot – even if people emphasise that in Nigeria they are much bigger, more glamorous and cost even more than in the UK. Mostly, a hall is rented and caterers employed to accommodate and feed the hundreds of invited and uninvited guests that include family, church, friends, work colleagues and their partners, friends and families etc.

In my experience, married couples form the largest proportion of the membership of RCCG parishes in the UK, and pastors and congregations aim to cater for their marital needs. The church promotes itself as mediator to save marriages.¹³³ Its activities provides married couples with a space where the centrality of marriage is recognised and promoted, where they are with other married couples and where their and their spouses' moral behaviour is monitored and disciplined (as well as self-disciplined). Bigger churches such as Jesus House maintain a special marriage ministry that organises social outings, conferences and counselling for married couples.

God's wish that two people get married is perceived as the precondition for a successful relationship. But even then, the social acceptance of divorce, unmarried cohabitation and the institutionalisation of same sex civil partnerships, the legality of abortion and a general liberal attitude towards sexual activity are perceived as reflections of the threatening decline of a Christian concept of marriage in Europe. Contrary to European legislation, the RCCG allows divorce only under extremely severe circumstances (e.g. where a woman is beaten in a life-threatening way); and once divorced, neither of the partners is allowed to re-marry in the church.¹³⁴ The dynamics of the prayer circle - the emphasis on marriage as seriously important business, the merging of the two people in the middle and the fencing off against the outside - have to be read in this tense context.

¹³³ Marriage has been central in RCCG practices from the beginning - though with changing contents. In the founding years, Akindayomi placed great emphasis on monogamous marriage, which distinguished him from his Aladura background. Many of the men - including Akindayomi himself - had several wives and sending away all but the first wife demanded great commitment (Adeboye 2007: 34, Ukah 2008: 33-34).

¹³⁴ Based on 1 Corinthians 7: 10-11. Interview with a London based RCCG Pastor, 06-11-2008.

“Wives, Submit...” - Power through Submission

Doctrinally, the relationship between married men and women is based on a few recurring biblical scriptures. The one that is probably quoted most frequently is the one referred to by the child who drew the picture for Sarah and James:

Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church: and he is the saviour of the body. Therefore as the church is subject unto Christ, so let the wives be their own husbands in every thing. Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it; (...) So ought men love their wives as their own bodies. He that loveth his wife loveth himself (...) For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall be joined unto his wife, and the two shall be one flesh. (Ephesians 5: 22-25, 28, 31)

On a doctrinal level, gender relations are often envisaged as ‘roles’, informed by God’s order. “Know your place in marriage” advises RCCG Pastor Adesina’s book *Marriage Partner* in the heading for the section that deals with ‘submission’ (Adesina 2008: 81). That the husband is the ‘head’ and the wife ought to ‘submit’ was hardly ever disputed in sermons and one-to-one encounters throughout my whole research across different RCCG parishes in Nigeria and in London, and was reproduced by men and women of all church ranks and social backgrounds equally. It was widely believed that the Western liberal/feminist aim to dismantle this gendered power hierarchy results in an instability of marriages. But even though marriage is perceived as a divine ‘natural’ order, it is not necessarily thought to be in the ‘nature’ of a woman to be submissive, nor is it always thought to be in the ‘nature’ of a man to lead. Women were often said to become rebellious or abuse their power, if the biblical order of male leadership is abandoned deliberately. Prayer and other religious practices are supposed to help overcome one’s failure to comply.

The trope of submission has not only run through Christian gender history, but also through Western feminist discourse. Much of the earlier feminist literature has built on a concept of female agency that excludes the possibility of simultaneous submission.

Female submission became equal to subordination and a sign of female powerlessness alongside de-politicisation and an inferior social status involving economic and decision-making disadvantages.¹³⁵ Mahmood's study counters this trend by revealing how pious religious (in her case Muslim Egyptian) women break through stereotypes of Western feminists and liberals (Mahmood 2005: 4). Their practices of active submission to men points to the fact that the desire to be free from structures of male domination is not necessarily universal, but specific to ideas of humanism, liberalism and Western feminism (ibid: 9).

I do not want to belittle the very real limitations that a doctrine of female submission often has for women in their actual lives, e.g. in the form of gendered dependencies and material inequalities in their marriages. Indeed, Cornwall notes a strong emphasis on female subordination in marriage for Nigeria. She also remarks however, that women in Nigeria display a long history of economic independence (Cornwall 1996: 8). Taking this ambivalence into account, the Pentecostal (and also otherwise common) insistence on hierarchical gender relations and fixed roles should not make us believe that women are without agency. Pentecostal women's submission is perhaps a tool to recover their virtuousness that was questioned by the moral discourses in the 1990s and their ascriptions of an inherent female tendency for suspicion, wickedness and craving for material wealth and social control (ibid.: 8).

Such marriage relationships are part of the RCCG Culture and based on the Pentecostal notion of an implicit ambivalence of power and agency that I have described earlier (see Chapter Five). If female submission is seen as inherently active and potentially powerful, we have to look at what exactly submission means and how it is negotiated, rather than equalling submission with subordination. The conceptual ambiguity of Pentecostal agency allows for a variety of notions of female submission which are all potentially 'true'. As we shall see, it can mean anything from enduring an emotionally detached, unsupportive or even violent husband on one end of the spectrum to a mere formulaic verbal acknowledgement of male authority on the other side. Which one of them is appropriate or 'biblical' is a matter of negotiation.

¹³⁵ See for example the otherwise very innovative article of Whitehead (1979: 12).

Hence, whether or not women should endure male dominance in a marriage is controversial among RCCG women in London. None of the women I spoke to in London condoned male violence against a wife, but some felt that contacting the local Social Services or the police brings shame on the whole family. At the Total Women Ministry's (TWM) Conference, a white English female guest pastor from Newcastle¹³⁶ used the Bible passage of the 'virtuous woman' to encourage her female listeners to carry the burdens that come with being a wife and mother without complaint.

Who can find a virtuous woman? for her price is far above rubies. The heart of her husband doth safely trust in her, so that he shall have no need of spoil. She will do him good and no evil all the days of her life. She seeketh wool, and flax, and worketh willingly with her hands, She is like the merchants' ships; she bringeth her food from afar. She riseth also while it is yet night (...) Strength and honour are her clothing; and she shall rejoice in time to come. She openeth her mouth with wisdom; and on her tongue is the law of kindness. She looketh well after her household, and eateth not the bread of idleness. Her children arise up and call her blessed; her husband also, and he praiseth her. Many daughters have done virtuously, but thou excellest them all. Favour is deceitful, and beauty is vain: but a woman that feareth the Lord, she shall be praised. (Proverbs 31: 10-15, 25-30).¹³⁷

The audience's response was unusually subdued. They did not seem to agree with her 'endurance' interpretation of submission. She had emphasised that women should not expect their spouse's support. But the scripture clearly mentions a trusting and praising husband as the virtuous woman's counterpart, one female listener explained to me afterwards. Such resistance to certain meanings and practices of 'submission' mark it as a site of struggle¹³⁸ over marital decision making power, control over resources and emotional (in)dependence. However, the TWM women's resistance to the white guest pastor's interpretation occurs *within* the 'divine gender order' by *shifting* the concept of female submission rather than dismissing it altogether.

¹³⁶ Fieldnotes, 05-07-2008.

¹³⁷ The selected verses were particularly emphasised in the discussions I have witnessed.

¹³⁸ See for resistance as *diagnostic* indicator also Abu-Lughod (1990).

Female (as well as male) pastors and RCCG members often likened the married couple to a body. The man takes over the function of the head and the woman the neck or the rest of the body. Two leading spouses would make marriage a multi-headed monster. However, the gender relationship is marked by complementarity: the man needs the woman to connect him to the body he belongs to. Otherwise he would become a floating head – also a monster and unable to survive. In this logic, the man values his wife and treats her well, gives her a say in decisions, and fulfils her needs voluntarily. This head-body scenario allows women to “escap[e] without leaving” a male-dominated order (Austin-Broos 1997: 237).

The TWM was founded ten years ago by RCCG Pastor Wunmi Omolara to help women spiritually “rise up like a mighty army”. The ministry aims to bring together Pentecostal female ministers, ministers’ wives and female members, to “empower women”, “especially in London” and to motivate them to “arise and shine” in their respective environments. Omolara demonstrated in her opening speech on the first day of conference, that acts of submission should not imply endurance and suffering. Omolara shares the leadership over one of the biggest RCCG parishes in Southeast London with her husband. As a high ranking female pastor and as the wife of a high ranking pastor, she is in the limelight of the church. She has to carefully balance her position of authority with her subordinate female identities as a helping married woman and a supportive pastor’s wife. To be a role model for the ‘Total Women’ of her ministry, she relies on this balance between (male-connotated) leadership and her (female-connotated) ability to submit. Her first appearance on stage at the annual TWM conference is an example of the intertwining of spiritual agency and female submission, and of a demonstration of ‘mutual love’ that eases out the contradiction between the two:

Pastor Wunmi goes on ‘stage’ to open the conference. She wears a sparkling dress made out of glamorous fabric that sparkles in blue and green, but is cut to fully cover her body. Her head is uncovered. She wears make-up, long hair and frameless glasses. She is short, but walks confidently upright. She is humorous, but at the same time puts on much less of a show than some of her male colleagues. Now, she spontaneously initiates a short song that unites the voices of everyone in the hall with hers. After a mere ‘thank you for coming’ directed at the audience, she turns to her husband who sits in the first row below her.

Looking at him, she tells the audience that he is the key to her success because “if your husband is not backing you up, you are going nowhere!” She stresses that her husband has always supported the ministry, believed in her work, encouraged her and even helped out financially. Wunmi then bows her head and upper body slightly towards him and addresses him directly. Her voice is low and tender, but we can hear her words clear and loud because she speaks into a microphone for all of us to hear. “My honey, my sugar, my lipstick on my lips, I love you. Thank you.” We had listened quietly so far, but after Pastor Wunmi’s warm words for her husband, the audience starts to clap and cheer excitedly for several minutes to celebrate his generosity, her humbleness, paired with boldly emotional words and their mutual love.¹³⁹

Like men, married women in the RCCG gain spiritual authority through a character that is self confident yet humble and through their dedication for the work of God. At the same time though, they must consolidate the respect they enjoy by knowing and performing a woman’s place in the ‘divine’ gender hierarchy. Even though she occupies a place close to the top in the church hierarchy, structurally, Pastor Wunmi is still ‘under’ her husband. She gains authority among the women in the audience through active and public gestures of submission to her husband; she becomes a relevant example they can apply to their life through recognising her as a submissive woman.

And yet, Pastor Wunmi’s behaviour is not just reproducing gendered inequalities. Although she bows down to her husband, she is still standing way above him on stage. She publicly exposes her dependency on the support of her husband – the fact that she needs him marks her as female and that she obtains it shows her value. Her acts of submission mark her gendered subject position as ‘biblical’ *despite* the power and authority it entails. For her, submission does not exclude the simultaneous possibility of spiritual and social empowerment. On this basis the women will critique the English guest pastor’s disempowered notion of female submission at a later point at the conference and discuss new or altered subject positions (Moore 1994) that allow for greater female agency within the Pentecostal gender order. Unlike ‘emancipation’ and ‘feminism’ these re-negotiations of femininity and female agency are not perceived as overturning the divinely instituted gender order, they are constructed to conform with the Bible. On stage, Pastor Wunmi performs a ‘living testimony’ that it is possible to be

¹³⁹ Total Women Conference. Fieldnotes, 02-7-2008 to 06-07-2008.

a help-meet in a Christian marriage *and* live a socially and spiritually meaningful individual life. In relation to female agency among Yoruba communities in the USA, Clarke calls this “techniques of empowered subjugation” (2004: 261).

In her analysis of Nigerian Christian pamphlets concerned with marriage, Newell detects a similar re-conceptualisation of submission in the few that are written by women. Submission becomes detached from obedience. In fact, it is portrayed as pleasurable under the influence of love for one’s romantic hero, a “darling husband” (2005: 316 - 317). Marital bliss is imagined “in the form of a domestic space which is egalitarian rather than dominated by the husband” (ibid: 319).¹⁴⁰

“Men, Love...” - Male Responsibility

In all readings of female submission, it is a woman’s relation to her husband (and children) that increases her value and recognition. The husband’s attitude remains a defining element in the marriage relationship. He is also thought to represent his wife and children in relation to larger society. It is thus significant that Pastor Wunmi praises her husband’s ability to trust, give and encourage in the example above. She enlarges her husband’s authority by pointing out his godly qualities and confirming her loyalty. As she is associated with him, this also increases her own ‘greatness’.

Pastor Wunmi performs her marital gender relations by *citing* and sufficiently reproducing the norm of female submission. Within this reproduction of submission as a voluntary devotion to a romantic hero marks a shift towards the potential empowerment of submitting women (see Armour and St. Ville 2006).¹⁴¹ As gender is a relational category, such shifts necessarily imply changes in the perception and performance of the ‘role’ of the Pentecostal husband. Discourses around male leadership and responsibility become interwoven with ‘love’ and the desire to protect and support the wife and to be the ‘head servant’ of the family. The husband too, submits: to God.

¹⁴⁰ How such dynamics are played out in the home is discussed further in Chapter Seven.

¹⁴¹ Armour and St. Ville’s reading of the possibility of shifts that is inherent in *citational* acts refers to Judith Butler’s work; here especially *Gender Trouble* (1999 [1990]).

In several RCCG branches in London I encountered an ideal of a strong but loving, approachable, patient husband and father. Some men engage in childcare and sometimes even in housework. This ideal of a 'new' Pentecostal manhood seems to be constructed firstly in contrast to a patriarchal and autocratic masculinity that is perceived as 'traditionally' Nigerian. Even though Sarah's husband James helps voluntarily around the house his relatives would accuse Sarah of 'abusing' him if they knew.¹⁴² It is secondly also constructed in contrast to a male figure perceived as irresponsible towards his family and social obligations and lacking discipline and respect for authority. To a certain degree this is a response to a perceived crisis of family in the UK and (media) stereotypes about black men. Pastor Olawale once stated his disappointment that school teachers seemed to assume that all fathers are absent in their children's lives. They tell children to give letters to their 'mother'. From the age of sixteen years, such letters are even addressed to the child him/herself! But in born-again families, such matters should be dealt with by the fathers.¹⁴³

The scripture: "Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it..." (Ephesians 5: 25; see above) is often used to encourage male demonstrations of emotions, humbleness before God and sacrifices for wife and family as the centrepiece of Pentecostal masculinity. According to Pastor Olawale, a wife is 'a good thing'. She is called 'miss' before she is married, because she is missing in some man's life. When a man finds what he had been missing, he treats it well, because he is glad to have it back. He dusts and cleans it well. Just like that, a husband should 'decorate' his wife. He emphasises that God told Adam (and all men) to rule the creatures of the world, but nowhere says the Bible that men rule over their wives.¹⁴⁴ Similarly to female submission (above), as well as the GO's humbleness (Chapter Four), it is the deliberate effort to give up power claims that ensures a powerful position. Married men are then able to maintain a place in the centre of family, society and in church, supported by a devoted wife.

¹⁴² Interview, 06-02-2010.

¹⁴³ Sermon, 20-09-2009.

¹⁴⁴ Bola and Frank's wedding in Tower of God. Fieldnotes, 29-08-2009.

The family-devoted Pentecostal husband is first and foremost an ideal. I was told many stories of church-going men who did not provide financially, had extra-marital lovers or were simply not very caring. According to the gender model of a submitting wife and a 'loving' husband, it is still up to the husband to decide to serve the family and act responsibly. Structurally and practically, this limits the possibility for empowerment of women drastically. Nevertheless, the RCCG women I spoke to insisted that Christian men are the better deal, compared to 'un-believers'. The following example perhaps illustrates why. Adebola and Stella are a middle aged married couple. Adebola works as administrator in Social Services of one of the London boroughs, Stella is a nursery school teacher. They both grew up and got married in Lagos. They used to be active RCCG members in Lagos and are now engaged in Tower of God. Adebola always wanted to live in London. Because he was born in the UK, he describes it as his 'roots', even though he was a baby when his parents returned to Nigeria. After their wedding, Adebola went to London and - like many other women I spoke to - Stella 'followed' him. When I interviewed them, they were sitting close together.¹⁴⁵ Adebola referred to Stella several times as his "beautiful queen" – producing a happy smile on her face. Stella and Adebola have been married for several years, but have no children. Staying childless is an experience that often puts strain on married couples and their relationships. However Adebola's demonstration of appreciation not only shows that they are close no matter what, it may also work as a protection for Stella against potential blame by Adebola's family for her 'failure' to deliver a child.

“One Flesh...” - Becoming a Marriage-Team

During the interview with Adebola and Stella, they often finished each other's sentences. While we were talking, they were both looking at me rather than each other, yet their reactions and knowing smiles revealed that they knew exactly what the other was about to say. They were taking turns to speak, working as a team, providing me with a narrative about who they were as a couple as well as individuals. They had developed an account about 'them' together, from one, united perspective. Even the

¹⁴⁵ 19-07-2009.

tales about their background and childhoods had become part of their common narrative, as if the events before they knew each other were destined to lead to a shared life.

One-ness between husband and wife is performed verbally and bodily. Couples like Stella and Adebola often wear clothes sewn out of the same fabric in church and at parties, to show their belonging publicly (see Illustration 9).¹⁴⁶ In different parishes of the RCCG in London, men testify publicly about the loyalty or encouraging ways of their wives. Women praise the gentleness or faithfulness of their husbands. Like demonstrations of self-discipline, the show-casing of mutual love is an *act of faith* (Marshall 2007: 146): the ‘loving’ is happening while performing it. The faith performance makes the love happen, rather than necessarily being a ‘reality’ beforehand. Those who currently do not enjoy their marriages and are “afraid to go home in the evening”, are often advised to be patient and invest work and time to further their unity.¹⁴⁷

¹⁴⁶ This practice is widespread in Yoruba society in Nigeria, but has been reframed and incorporated as Pentecostal Nigerian practice.

¹⁴⁷ Guest pastor at Sarah and James’ wedding, 11-04-2009.

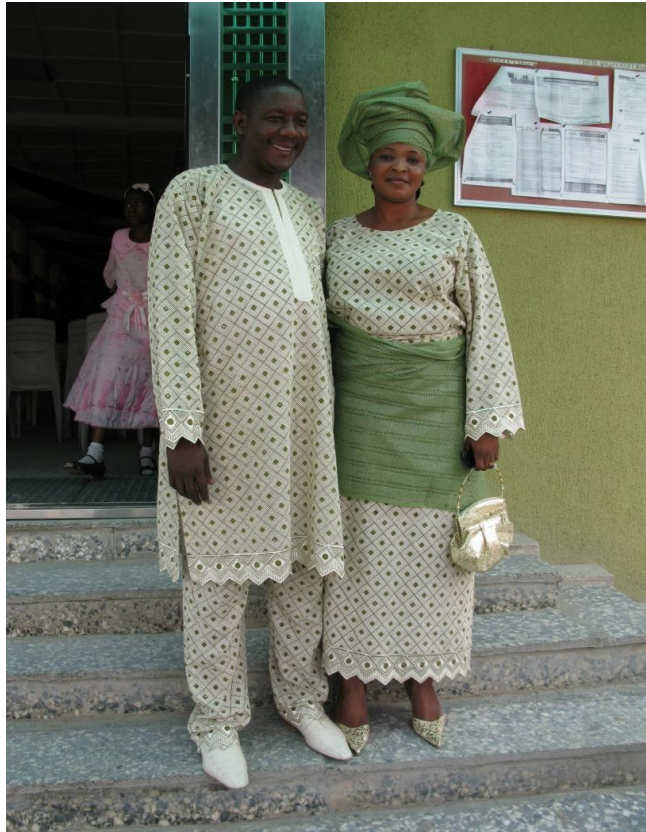


Illustration 9: Married couple
demonstrating their mutual belonging through dress.

The more the belonging of husband and wife to each other is shown, the more sealed the boundaries towards the ‘outside’ become. Femi is a forty-two year old Nigerian-born man and new member of Tower of God. He grew up in Ife and Ibadan but went to live and work in Lagos as a young man. Before he got married in Lagos, his bachelor friends were coming and going to his place as they pleased. After his wife had moved in, they had to announce their intention to visit and ask whether it was suitable.¹⁴⁸ Femi was no longer the friend they could visit at any time; he had become part of a couple. Before Bola got married to Frank, her female friends organised a ‘spinsters’ party. One female guest had recently got married herself and advised Bola, the bride-to-be: after the wedding, she should spend less time with unmarried friends. They will not understand her situation and may give advice that causes her and her husband to drift apart instead of strengthening their bond.¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁸ Interview with Femi, 05-05-2009.

¹⁴⁹ Fieldnotes, 22-08-2009.

Even if groom and bride have become ‘best friends’ by the time they get married, it is expected to take some time until the marriage runs smoothly. Oluwa, the Jesus House member we encountered in the previous chapter, tells me that her marriage got “better and better” over the first couple of years – implying that they had problems at first.¹⁵⁰ The changes that take place for newlyweds immediately after the wedding are drastic: they move in together, re-organise their finances and their patterns of everyday life. They reduce their circle of friends to spend more time with the spouse. Sarah and James, for example, call each other several times during the day. For Sarah, the biggest change is that she asks James’ permission before she does ‘anything’. But she also particularly enjoys sharing everyday life, bed and their financial burdens.¹⁵¹

Establishing a family home is a big task, especially if the new wife falls pregnant almost immediately. Their ‘home’ is bigger and more expensive than a single person’s ‘place’, as it ought to have the potential to house future children or visiting relatives. The emphasis on the social relations that make a ‘home’ is reflected in a typical arrangement of couples’ flats that I often found when I visited RCCG members at theirs: the living room (which single people often do not have, because it is rented out as an additional room in shared flats to keep the rent down) is a space where visitors are received. As Botticello notes, it can be seen as a ‘transitional’ space in between an outside and the protected ‘inside’ of the bedroom (2007: 17). Typically there are chunky leather sofas and arm chairs lined up along the walls, interspersed by small stools or coffee tables on which the hostess usually places a tray with drinks or food. The seats are facing a television with a huge screen (usually switched on) and a stereo; sometimes there is a big fridge-freezer or a washing machine in a corner if it does not fit elsewhere. There may be a clock and some fake flowers, a table with a laptop and a fairly empty shelf or glass cabinet in the room, too (see Illustration 10).¹⁵² The kitchen always seems to be used a lot, filled with provisions for visitors such as soft drinks and cookies, and there is often a pot of stew bubbling away. On the few occasions when I was invited to enter a marital bedroom, the room was dominated by a neatly made up double bed.

¹⁵⁰ Interview, 23-11-2008.

¹⁵¹ Interview with Sarah, James and Precious, 06-02-1020.

¹⁵² Such arrangements are similar to living rooms in urban Nigeria (see Illustration 11).



Illustration 10: RCCG member's living room in Europe.



Illustration 11: RCCG member's living room in Lagos.

To overcome initial difficulties, Pastor Agu suggested to do special things together (e.g. go for a meal) and to “love each other into something better”.¹⁵³ Surrendering to each other is connected to a wider Pentecostal ethics of submission where every born-again Christian has first and foremost to submit to God. Often, the woman is implicitly thought to ‘voluntarily’ give up more control in the marriage as a sign of her love for her husband. Kunmi and Rosemary, a married couple and both Jesus House members in their late thirties, explain that both spouses need to develop a triangular relationship with God to be able to ‘really’ love and let go of control.

Kunmi: I think the praying together is kind of different from the individual. Why? The difference is that the praying together is always this Proverb that says ‘a family that prays together, stays together’. So the praying together is just knitting us together really.

Rosemary: It develops a sense of an intimacy.

Kunmi: Exactly. Exactly. It’s the unity. It’s the... and also, also going into the scriptures as well is this, if one or two shall agree on anything on this earth, it shall be done to you. So the power of one is kind of lesser than the power of two. Two – there’s more force to that, there’s more power to that, and that’s what the Bible’s also saying. (...)

Rosemary: You get to encourage each other and you get to lay bare before each other. The Bible says: “and God made man and woman and they were both naked in the Garden of Eden”; and I find in the place of prayer you are able to open up about your weaknesses and your issues, and encourage each other and pray. And you know, you could say: “this is the challenge I am facing at work concerning this...”, and we just hold hands and pray together about it, and there’s a healing that just takes place. ...I mean, this man that I love is praying and concerned and worried about this issue! He’s taking it up to God! - and vice versa as well. And obviously you might do that on your own, but you don’t experience that level of intimacy and that level of oneness together when you do that.¹⁵⁴

The notion that men, too, have to submit to God can be a powerful tool for women to insist upon male financial and emotional responsibility for the family and the duty to be faithful. Peperkamp sees this as the basis of a new model of Christian marriage (in her

¹⁵³ Marriage Revolution Conference at Jesus House. Fieldnotes, 10-11-2008.

¹⁵⁴ Interview with Jesus House members Rosemary and Kunmi, carried out jointly with Simon Coleman, 25-07-2009.

case in relation to pious Catholic couples in Poland). It embodies a different relationship between the spouses: “[w]ife obeys husband, but husband serves the wife and suffers for her” (2008: 127). This model involves a masculinity of the ‘loving’ and responsible husband that I have described above; a “servant-leader” rather than “head-leader” (ibid: 128). For Robbins, the reconfiguration of women’s understanding of their own position as primarily serving God by subordinating herself under her husband is part of a gender formation that is typical for a wider Pentecostal culture (2004a: 133). However, his assumption, that demanding women’s subordination under men is only legitimate when those men act as godly leaders (ibid.: 133, in reference to Smilde 1997), is somewhat less clear-cut in the context of the RCCG in London. Often, pastors encourage women to submit to their un- or less-believing husbands and follow their decision, even if they are convinced it is not beneficial. In a Pentecostal Nigerian context, women thus submit doubly - to God and their husband.

In contrast to the strictness of the prohibition of sex outside marriage, sexuality within the marital union becomes not only legitimate, but desirable and even necessary. Individual RCCG members I interviewed usually kept quiet about bedroom details. But pastors reported from their counselling experiences that unequal sexual dissatisfaction is often a cause for friction among couples. As their sexuality is a topic many members find difficult to discuss, pastors use sermons to talk about sexual matters to a wide audience. The fact that God is the reference point for both man and woman, in a triangular relationship structure, leads Peperkamp to coin the expression of Christian marriage as a divinely instituted “threesome between husband, wife and God” (Peperkamp 2008: 124). This may sound provocative. But at the marriage conference in Jesus House, when Pastor Agu talks about marital sex, he suggests that the Holy Spirit participates: he sits on the edge of the bed and enjoys watching. Whereas pre- and extra-marital intercourse is a sin, marital sex is not shameful, but indeed a holy act that deepens the bond between the couple.¹⁵⁵

¹⁵⁵ Agu explicitly excludes homosexual practices from the ‘holy’ variety, along with pornography, incest and forced, painful or violent sex. He is not sure whether oral sex practices are to be considered biblically acceptable and suggests that the couples have to find their own standpoint in communication with the Holy Spirit.

Conflict and Resolution

Pastor Agu's lecture at the 'Marriage Revolution' Conference in RCCG Jesus House was entertaining, interspersed with jokes and personal experiences. It was also an occasion where couples could spend some time with their partner outside a perhaps tense situation at home, eat nice food without having to cook (or pay) and socialise with other Christian married couples. Potentially they could approach members of Jesus House's 'Tight Knots' ministry that offers marital counselling. The RCCG tries to provide such sheltered spaces of enjoyment and help, but it is still difficult to achieve marital unity amidst the financial and social strains of everyday life in London. Spending time together is often difficult to combine with jobs and child care. Rachel, her husband Jacob, Lizzy and her husband Gideon are all four Tower of God members, around forty, and born and raised in Nigeria. Both husbands work night shifts. The men look after their children when they come back from school in the afternoon until Lizzy and Rachel are back from their daytime jobs. All four are employed in low-paid jobs and cannot afford to work less. Whereas Rachel seems generally happy with the arrangement, Lizzy is concerned about possible moral and emotional consequences for marital relationships: she says that in such a situation both spouses are easily emotionally and sexually unsatisfied and a husband may start 'looking outside'.¹⁵⁶

Conflicts are prime points for anthropologists to gain insights into the negotiation of power relations. In this case, controversies around men as 'head' and women as 'help-meet' reveal insights into negotiations around gendered power relations beyond theological questions. RCCG Pastors engage heavily in preventing marriages from 'collapsing', assessing why they do and developing efficient advice in marriage counselling sessions. They are also among the people that are considered appropriate to be approached when marital conflicts are taken 'outside'.¹⁵⁷ In members' and pastors' narratives, marital frictions often escalate because an 'emotional' women 'flares up' (is verbally abusive and aggressive) or because a man is a 'difficult husband' (which can

¹⁵⁶ Interestingly, Lizzy does not assume that dissatisfaction may make the wife 'look outside', too. Interview, 26-08-2009.

¹⁵⁷ Towards me, people only talked about past conflicts or issues that their friends have gone through, but not their own current issues.

mean anything from being emotionally unapproachable or sexually unfaithful, to physically abusive). This struggle for gendered power highlights the conceptual ambivalence that is inherent in the Pentecostal marriage as ‘threesome’ with the Holy Spirit. In the relationship with Jesus, men and women are equally submitting, while as husband and wife, they ought to maintain a clear hierarchy.

Marriage is often seen as an ‘investment’ of time, energy and finances. Trust is weighed up against the risk of betrayal. Some women felt that their manifold tasks, foremost the bearing of and looking after children, weaken them physically and puts off their development in other areas, such as their career. ‘It takes God’ to resolve this tension, as RCCG members would often say. Four recurring areas of marital conflict were: children, money, sex/love and power.

As marriages are expected to be ‘fruitful’, many strains come from not having children. Couples that do have small children may disagree over methods and rules of discipline for their children. With teenagers, the issues become more complex as many parents in South London fear for their offspring’s security and worries about their potential involvement in gangs can affect family life profoundly.¹⁵⁸

Money issues feature particularly prominently in London because of the high costs of living and the expectations for material support for family members ‘back home’ in Nigeria. Because highly paid jobs are hardly available, often both partners have to work, perhaps in several jobs at odd hours. The negotiation around who has to contribute how much to the family income is mixed with West-African tropes of money-hungry women who insist on an expression of appreciation in material form, as well as ‘useless husbands’ who are unable or unwilling to provide for the family.¹⁵⁹ In the experience of the pastor of one of the RCCG parishes on the Old Kent Road, some men leave a family because their wife is not supporting them enough by either contributing financially or

¹⁵⁸ See also Chapter Seven.

¹⁵⁹ From the literature we know that female economic activity and female own-account budgeting among Yoruba has a long tradition. Unfortunately, I do not have enough ethnographic insight into how this plays out in a Pentecostal diaspora context.

by reducing their expectations and they feel they cannot cope with the ‘pressure’ anymore.¹⁶⁰

The third area of conflict has to do with potential, suspected or actual sexual unfaithfulness. Jealousy is a common motif and almost expected from both spouses. As much as this may lead to a certain patience with a jealous partner, conflicts arise around inquiries relating to friends of the opposite sex. Spouses – like James and Sarah - check the other’s mobile phone entries, and call frequently to check on their activities. Men are thought to be easily attracted by beautiful or sexy women other than their wives. To counter this ‘natural’ tendency, married women in the RCCG are often encouraged to invest time, thought and money in their bodies (e.g. in clothes, hair, hygiene/cosmetics and physical exercise) aiming for their husband’s undivided attention.¹⁶¹

Struggles for authority are implicit in the three conflict areas above. But the inability of many husbands to provide financially questions their position of dominance directly. Similarly, women’s upward mobility becomes problematic when it exceeds her husband’s. To avoid conflicts over such issues, Olawale suggested to his congregation that a wife should give her whole income to her husband and let him decide how to spend it, even if her earnings are higher than his. Such measures are intertwined with the legal position of women in Europe that are often perceived as unjust: “Europe is a motherland, not a fatherland”, as one of Femi’s friends and fellow Nigerian put it, in a disappointed tone.¹⁶²

To illustrate the complex power negotiations between spouses Rachel told me the story of her friend Toyese who was living next door to Rachel with her daughter. Her husband and the father of the girl had stayed back in Nigeria. Toyese had decided to provide the letter of invitation for him to re-join them in London – a major step for Toyese, because it meant she was no longer liable for state welfare benefits for single mothers. She looked for a childminder, and worked full time to fulfil the visa conditions for her husband. During the process of obtaining the visa, Toyese suspected that her husband had changed in character. Rachel advised her to continue the process despite

¹⁶⁰ Interview, 21-11-2008.

¹⁶¹ For example at meetings of the parishes’ women’s groups or at all-female conferences.

¹⁶² Interview with Femi and Luke, 31-03-2009.

her doubts. But from the day of his arrival in London Toyese's husband spent his time making friends instead of searching for work. Toyese filled the fridge and paid rent and bills all by herself. They rowed very often because of the man's lack of contribution. One time when they rowed, they attacked each other and – according to Rachel – Toyese's ring left a scratch at the man's neck. The husband called the police, who took Toyese away to spend the night at the police station. Rachel perceived this as a double humiliation for Toyese: a husband who was not man enough to provide *and* dared to shamelessly use the UK police against Toyese. After the incident, the husband moved out to live elsewhere in London - with the residence status that Toyese had enabled him to obtain. Rachel felt that she had given the wrong advice to her friend. Had her husband stayed in Nigeria, Toyese would not have had to undergo a separation and the social stigma this brings especially for women. It is seen as "(...) something terrible. It's just like, ...you are just finished. I mean, no other man will ever come to marry you".¹⁶³ Women in conflict-ridden marriages are advised at RCCG women's conferences that they should run their family 'on their knees' in prayer. Contrary to what Toyese did, they should abstain from confronting a 'difficult husband' directly (verbally or physically) and leave the actual changing of the husband's heart to God.

In many cases however, both, husband and wife have an interest in resolving conflicts in the relationship with their spouse to restore 'peace' in the home. Like submission, giving in, overcoming anger and forgiving are also acts of faith, which bring them closer to God. Rosemary and Kunmi, as well as Stella and Adebola, the two couples we have already met above, try to never go to bed without having resolved an argument. Adebola and Stella have developed strategies that accommodate their particular characters: once his wife has 'run out of steam' and finished with her complaints, Adebola usually makes the first step towards reconciliation - out of love for Stella and out of 'fear of God'. Sometimes, the voice of the Holy Spirit specifically tells him what to do. The Pentecostal emphasis on responsibility and humility of both genders and 'mutual understanding' within the 'marriage team' aims at opening room for manoeuvre in conflict resolution and in the negotiation of the power relations that suit them as an individual couple. At the beginning of their married life, Oluwa and her husband Dami

¹⁶³ Interview with Mojisola, 29-05-2009.

from Jesus House sometimes went to see a pastor for support in the spiritually connotated process of establishing a peaceful home.

Conclusion

This chapter has discussed ideas and practices around wedding and marriage relationships in the RCCG. Establishing the inner unity of the married couple against a morally dangerous ‘outside’ is perceived as a social as well as a spiritual project and is essential in the constitution of gendered Pentecostal selves. The relationship within a marriage is marked by male head-ship and female submission. This gender hierarchy is however complicated by the couple’s triangular relationship with God. A personal relationship with Jesus can potentially empower women, but especially demands selfless-ness and servant-ship of men. This bears similarities to the way authority in the RCCG is negotiated on other levels. The GO Adeboye and other male pastors have to navigate the ambivalence between an institutionalised hierarchical order on one side and a much more flexible and unpredictable relationship with the divine that bears the potential to widen the scope of agency. Pastor Wunmi’s example showed a further dimension of how marriage relationships and religious authority are mutually constituted. In both cases, tensions are mediated by the ‘miracle’ of being able to increase authority by giving up power claims, of gaining agency *through* submission. The ambivalence between a divine gender order and a participatory flexible relationship with God is similar in the RCCG in Nigeria and the UK. However, in the context of financial pressures, European social legislation and less social control through relatives, the negotiations in the UK seem to drift more towards wives’ empowerment and husbands’ humble love than in Nigeria. Both modes of becoming active Pentecostals that we have looked at so far – self-discipline and trustful submission – involve pentecostally knowledgeable adults. The next chapter widens this perspective to the embodied process of learning about Pentecostal morality in children. This mainly occurs within the dynamics of the family home. To educate children about ‘right’ and ‘wrong’, discipline and a certain insulation of the family unit against an immoral outside is required.

Chapter Seven

Forming Pentecostal Selves in the Home

Rachel and her husband Jacob - both Yoruba from South-West Nigeria in their later thirties or early forties - are members of RCCG Tower of God and came to London together ten years ago. They have three children. Stephen (aged thirteen) and Mark (ten) go to school near their flat in Southeast London; Amy (three) is still at home. Jacob works full time on night shifts as a hospital nurse. Rachel works part time during the day as a prison nurse. On her days off she works on expanding her trading business in shoes, clothes and jewellery. She sells in London, but has to go on buying trips to Vienna, Milan and Paris. Rachel is a deaconess in the Tower of God, involved in various departments and spends at least three evenings per week in church, in addition to the whole of Sundays. I was able to hang out with Rachel in her newly opened shop off the Old Kent Road. Those hours were precious time that she would not have had for me otherwise. In addition to work, business and church, Rachel considers both childcare and the household 'her' domain. The two boys have just started helping with the cleaning, but cooking is almost entirely her responsibility. Some of the time, Jacob looks after Amy; but when he does not, Rachel organises other solutions with her friends. Although she is extremely well organised, she relies on a network of neighbours and church members for unforeseen circumstances: in autumn 2009 she had to stay longer at work to cover for a sick colleague. Her delay overlapped with the start of her husband's shift. She asked a Tower of God usher to pick her children up from their house, so that her husband could leave for work. The usher took them to church for the duration of the Wednesdays' Bible study. By the time he brought them back after two or three hours, Rachel had got back from work. Rachel and Jacob's three children inhabit the centre of their lives and household. Rachel lost her mother when she was a young

child and grew up with her elderly grandmother in a small village. From the age of six, she stayed with relatives in Ibadan under crowded circumstances, lacking a sense of protection. At the time, she insists, this was 'normal' for her, but she is concerned to offer her own children a better childhood. In the summer during my research, Stephen was due to start Secondary School. Rachel and Jacob considered sending him to a boarding school in Nigeria. In the end they found none suitable and/or affordable - very much to Stephen's relief! However, the process of enquiry highlighted Rachel and Jacob's fear for their boys about the moral and physical dangers of growing up in Southeast London. Shortly after Stephen settled into his new school, Rachel was contacted by Mark's teacher to alert her that he was getting involved with the 'wrong people'. In this case, Rachel was grateful for the watchfulness of the teacher, but she also knows of examples where the involvement of state institutions in family affairs led to the children being taken into care by social services. For Rachel, bringing her children up 'in the Lord' is a means to keep them safe in their environment in London, and a general resource that enables her children to live a materially, socially and emotionally fulfilled life. Stephen, Mark and Amy usually accompany her to church, where they attend Sunday school or just play with the children of other members. At home, the family holds regular prayers and Bible studies. All three children are involved in the meetings of the House Fellowship group that Rachel leads, in the same way as any of the adult participants. Amy is too small to understand about the value or meaning of coins. Nevertheless she already grasps the importance 'money' has for adults. She usually goes round asking for coins, to then 'donate' them as offerings to God/the church at the end of the fellowship.

In Nigerian Pentecostalism the nuclear family serves as the environment to reproduce Pentecostal selves (parents and children), in order ultimately to have an impact on the church and to transform wider society.¹⁶⁴ This chapter firstly gives insights into everyday organisation and a model of family structure with the mother at its heart. Secondly, it focuses on the concept of 'discipline' as the mode of authority that governs the relationship between Pentecostal parents and children in a London that is perceived as immoral and dangerous. And thirdly, it explores the friction with the British state

¹⁶⁴ This also applies to other varieties of Christianity and indeed other religions. However, the form this takes in my case is impacted by the Nigerian background and the migration situation in London.

over Pentecostal practices of discipline that may include forms of physical punishment. Encapsulation and invisibility of the family as Pentecostal space away from the state is a mode that is influenced by experiences in Nigeria and is employed to avoid the British state's interference into what they perceive as morally necessary practices.

Negotiating the Order of the Pentecostal Family Home

Household studies have mostly been carried out in the area of gender and/or development. Following a feminist agenda, they initially sought to understand the nature of women's subordination. Moving beyond 'roles' and representations more recently, they look at gendered power dynamics - competing interests, conflict and processes of 'bargaining' (e.g. Whitehead 1981). They are increasingly taking the household's permeability and its embedded-ness within larger-scale cultural, economic and political processes into account (Moore 1994: 86-88) – in our case Pentecostalism and the migration context.

Nigerian Pentecostalism promotes the nuclear family, ideally a married couple and their children, as its core spiritual and social unit (see Illustration 12). It constructs the family as encapsulated to the degree that is necessary to make it the bedrock of the reproduction of Pentecostal selves. Within the migrant families I worked with, conflicts often arise around the redistribution of scarce wages between family members, spouses and the extended families 'back home'. In the RCCG (and generally in Nigerian Pentecostalism), the clear priority of the nuclear family can sometimes help to solve such conflicts. Like other churches, the RCCG provides a family friendly environment where parents and children are offered activities and find friends and mentors.¹⁶⁵ To emphasise this, the congregation acts itself as a 'family' where all members are caring 'brothers' and 'sisters'; the pastors act as the concerned parents. As such, individual Pentecostals engage in the reproduction of Pentecostal order in and through their children. As they are involved in church as well as wider society and economy, families

¹⁶⁵ See Dijk (2004) for marriage and family among Ghanaian Pentecostals in the Netherlands.

have got a mediating and potentially amplifying role towards ‘the world’, being able to reach fields the church as institution cannot.



Illustration 12: RCCG family
celebrating their daughter's first birthday in London.

Children are one of the main aims of a marriage.¹⁶⁶ They catapult both mother and father into ‘proper’ adulthood. Children also bind the couple together and mark their union as ‘fruitful’ and as ‘blessed’. The importance of having children resonates with a wider cultural, historical and economical context among Yoruba in Nigeria, in which a person’s ‘self-realization’ is achieved through wealth in people (Barber 1995: 215). The Nigerian men and women who consult the Yoruba Nigerian medicine vendor in Southeast London in Botticello’s study are heavily concerned with the functions of their reproductive organs (2009a: 70ff). In this light, the biblical doctrine of ‘being fruitful and multiplying’ appears much more like a divine promise than a command, and for born-again, Pentecostal practice become a means to achieve conception and/or avoid miscarriages.¹⁶⁷ Children also bring joy, future and expansion. They complete the ‘home’, which my interviewees often described as their ‘base’, a resting place, where

¹⁶⁶ This stands in stark contrast to the undesirability of conception out of wedlock. Though often overlooked in church discourse, there are single mothers in RCCG congregations in London. Other women are said to have had terminations.

¹⁶⁷ For Pentecostal fertility treatment among Ghanaians in Berlin see Maier (2006).

people can be trusted and things are familiar. The home is an environment of emotional security and bears meaning beyond its spiritual and social significance.

The biblical gender hierarchy of the leading man and the helping wife is translated into relatively standardised 'roles' in everyday family practice. The husband is the financial 'provider' of food, clothes and shelter for himself, wife and children; the wife takes care of children and does the housework. Among my research participants, most men work full time or have several part-time jobs. However, wives mostly supplement their husbands' income by working part time. Whereas this is considered 'normal' for a woman as 'helpmate' of her husband, it would be considered optional and extraordinary for the husband to help in the household.¹⁶⁸

The upholding of this hierarchy can be seen in the context of gender discussions among a Nigerian urban middle class in Nigeria. The second issue of the Lagos-based magazine *You 'N' Your Child*¹⁶⁹ asks its readers: "Would You Rather Be A House Husband?" Virtually all commentators are strongly opposed to the idea on biblical or cultural grounds. "(...) It is not even scriptural: a man who cannot provide for his household is worse than an infidel (Bible verse)" says S.A., a banker. Another reader writes: "Never! My culture does not permit it. If such an opportunity was given to any woman, she will definitely abuse it and start dictating her husband. F.O.O. - Accountant". RCCG members in London recognise that circumstances for families in London differ from the Nigerian context. However, ideals in the RCCG London correspond with those published in the magazine above. The mother's role in the home and a young child's life is emphasised as natural and essential.

Many of the male RCCG members in London I spoke to do help in the household on a voluntary basis, especially with childcare and cooking. Femi's wife and their three children live in Magdeburg, a sleepy town in former East Germany. Femi commutes between his family and London where he does a course in criminology. In spring 2009, I visited him and his family in Magdeburg. His wife had been ill and had to be hospitalised on the day I arrived. Femi took over the complete household and the care

¹⁶⁸ In my experience this applies for both, London and Nigeria.

¹⁶⁹ I bought this in the University of Lagos book store in January 2009.

for their three children, including the youngest baby. While in emergencies men are able and willing to manage the household, in ‘normal’ situations, women’s centrality in the family home is often reinforced. The women I spoke to in London often felt that they were more tied down by children and household than they knew from Nigeria. They had less help from friends and relatives and were expected to postpone advancements in career or business until their children were older. One Saturday afternoon, while we wait for other members of Tower of God’s drama group to arrive, Lizzy tells us how tired she feels. She had got up early to cook for the family despite her short night’s sleep owing to the church’s Night Vigil the previous night. While her husband slept in, she did not have a choice but to do her womanly duty.¹⁷⁰ Like Lizzy, several others of my female married interviewees perceive their motherhood as a time-consuming and binding sacrifice.

Even though many of the women I spoke to perceive their duties as a big burden, they do not expect men to take over some of those responsibilities beyond occasional voluntary offers. Among my research participants, men seem to help more in London than in Nigeria, perhaps because they are not mocked or pitied by friends and family for being ‘pushed around’ by an allegedly lazy and dominant wife. But a husband’s help in the household has to come in small doses, to avoid the loss of his status as the ‘head’, but also to preserve a space for recognition of the ‘woman of the home’. The dynamics around childcare in Rachel and Jacob’s family that I have described in the beginning of this chapter illustrate the complexity that arises in an economic situation that makes it difficult to maintain clear-cut men’s and women’s domains.

Rachel is the one in charge of cooking. She says that her husband is “a proper African man – [one of] those people that believe that the woman is the one that should do the cooking”.¹⁷¹ Even though her husband often prepares the starchy component of his ‘African’ meals or warms up food for the children when she is not around, neither of them counts this as ‘cooking’. Rachel decides what to have and carries out most of the work. On her days off, Rachel cooks stew and a big pot of jollof rice as the base of the meals for several days. The family’s two big fridge freezers and the microwave are

¹⁷⁰ The slight tone of pride in her voice reminds us that women do increase their self-esteem and respect from others when ‘enduring’.

¹⁷¹ Interview, 21-05-2009.

essential tools in the planning of the family's meals. Rachel knows what foods each family member likes, but as a nurse she also has an opinion about what is healthy for them. She makes especially sure that her children do not eat too much of the 'chicken and chips' they like. She sometimes copies 'Western' recipes that she sees on cookery programmes on TV to please the taste that they have acquired from eating school dinners. She takes pride of being a good cook of the 'Nigerian' food Jacob 'needs' - an ability that she learned from her grandmother. Despite her taking care and regulating what the others eat, she herself claims to eat 'whatever is there', putting the rest of her family before her own needs.

The different family members take on specific 'roles' in the preparation and consumption of food: Jacob does not cook and needs African food, prepared by his wife. The children need 'their jollof rice' and are too clumsy to help cooking. Rachel is a good cook who fulfils the needs of her family and puts herself last. If we look at those practices of 'taking one's place' (through a Butlerian lens) as a performative reproduction of power relations, we can see that Rachel is not just passively coerced into the role of the family cook. She is actively engaged in reproducing the needs of her children to be cooked for as well as the taste of her husband of a particular food that only she can prepare. Jacob is actively engaged in cultivating his need for Nigerian meals to maintain a space in which his wife can prove her value, and in constructing his kitchen activity as 'not cooking'. Tower of God's head usher Tayo is Yoruba, grew up with his mother and father and lived and worked in Lagos before coming to London. In an interview about marriage relationships, he told me that his father has never ever refused his mother's food, even when they were having a row. To refuse her food would have meant to deny the respect she deserved for cooking for him - for knowing and occupying her place. It would also have meant to reject her reconciliation offer to recreate a bond through eating.¹⁷² The compliance to such gendered ideals around cooking is much more of a burden for Rachel than for Jacob. She is incredibly busy juggling all her domestic, professional and spiritual duties. But it also creates freedom: because Rachel fulfils her domestic 'role' reliably, her husband cannot protest when she spends a lot of time in church.

¹⁷² Interview with Tayo and Iris, 25-05-2009.

In such a light, cooking is more than a matter of female dependency. Husband, wife and children are all agents and simultaneously acted upon in a specific way. “[H]ouseholds (...) produce specific sorts of persons with specific social identities, and particular rights and needs” (Moore 1994: 92). Cooking and eating is a gendered interaction, a bodily Pentecostal practice that aims at the stabilisation of a particular regime of power in the home and the reproduction of Pentecostal selves: wives who submit and husbands who appreciate their wives (see Illustration 13).¹⁷³



Illustration 13: Wife feeding her husband cake

at their traditional (Yoruba) wedding ceremony in Southeast London.

Children are part, if not at the centre, of the project of reproducing Pentecostal selves in the home. Pentecostals ought to bring their children up ‘in the Lord’ to become members of the ‘Kingdom of God’, like the parents themselves. This resonates with a wider Yoruba concept that sees “(...) children as social and biological extensions of parents in space-time” (Botticello 2009a: 198); especially mothers and children are

¹⁷³ Simultaneously, proximity and distance to ethnic markers is negotiated.

entangled in a mutual reciprocity along a linear time line, where parental investments are expected to return at a later point, as well as along lateral space lines that connect the parents with other worlds and promise the accumulation of social status through their children (ibid.: 208-210). When children are small, men are not expected to be able to take care of them in the same way that their wife can. In church services, babies are usually with their mothers. When Femi's wife was discharged from hospital, she spent a long while bathing the baby and changing his clothes – despite the fact that she was still very weak and in pain, and despite Femi having already bathed and dressed him only a couple of hours earlier. She was aware that Femi had managed the household and children on his own for the past days, but her actions emphasised a special bond between mother and baby as well as a superior way of doing things. While this is not true for Femi, some men are indeed clumsy with feeding toddlers or changing nappies owing to lack of practice. However, as the children grow older the relationship of fathers with their offspring changes. As the 'head' of the family and concerned with the representation of the family towards the 'outside', they are responsible for being a role model as well as enforcing rules and sanctioning 'wrong' behaviour.

London as a Morally Difficult Environment

There are many obstacles for adult migrants to make the most of London's possibilities. With regard to child rearing, the city appears in sermons and interviews as a social context that makes the moulding of offspring into adult Pentecostals particularly difficult. Institutional racism in the labour market shapes the experiences of the parents. To avoid similar experiences for the future of their children, parents often emphasise the necessity to study hard and perform well at school and encourage their children to be bold in their aspirations and ignore stigmatisations and negative predictions of others (such as school teachers or the media).

Although the media discourse around gang related gun- and knife crime in Southeast London is saturated with generalisations and stigmatisations of black males, it is hardly deniable that there is a dynamic in the area that can threaten the physical and psychological wellbeing of young people. As several boys of Nigerian parentage have

been victims of attacks,¹⁷⁴ many RCCG members fear for the lives of their children. Both the severity of the problem and the gravity of concern show in youth projects and drop-in centres, solicitors specialising in family, immigration and crime issues and offering 24/7 service, posters that campaign against gang violence, efforts to improve local playgrounds or flowers at the road side to mark a gang crime scene.

Like in media and politics, the RCCG often attributes youth crime to ‘broken’ families. But whereas in the media, teenage- and single motherhood are often seen as a ‘class’ issue that is separate from the more general emergence of alternative family models, the RCCG locates the root in a more general erosion of traditional forms of marriage, the acceptance of early sexual activity and same sex partnerships and liberal policies e.g. around sexual education in schools. Furthermore, the liberal concept of child empowerment is thought to disempower parents to control their offspring and make children feel ‘bigger’ than they actually are. Anti-social behaviour in public as well as threats towards parents at home is thought to be one result of such an attitude.

To achieve better protection of their children’s lives as well as raise the next generation of born-again Christians, ‘discipline’ is seen as the basic tool to shape the children’s whereabouts, social network, activities, attitudes and aspirations. In interviews, adult RCCG members overwhelmingly referred to their experience in their childhoods. Most men and women felt strongly about having had a good moral ‘foundation’ through a ‘strict upbringing’ that included being beaten by their father and teachers for doing ‘wrong’ or ‘silly’ things. It also often included a strong Christian orientation, such as having to attend church and family Bible studies, having to memorise Bible verses, fasting, being chastised for lying etc. Precious, whose father was a strict military man, recalls that his beatings were ‘unpalatable’, but paid off in the long run:

Precious: There are some certain things, you can’t just go out there and do, because of your upbringing. My father dealt with those thoroughly. You don’t mess around! (...)

Katrin: And was that an upbringing that you enjoyed?

¹⁷⁴ Among them is David Idowu, a member of the Nigerian Pentecostal Christ Apostolic Church (CAC), who was stabbed in July 2008, a stone’s throw from the Old Kent Road.

Precious: Yes! If... well, at that time it's not really palatable. Because we were all like: 'Ah! How can he...!' – my daddy will get rope, it's just like a belt. But it's a rope. Twisted. Three. If my daddy brings out that thing, you just know: 'Oh, that day, you are dead.' [she laughs] Because nobody is coming to rescue you.¹⁷⁵

A Tower of God church worker, Isaac, is one of the few who did not have such Christian-inspired strict moral guidance. In an interview, he described to me the painful process of developing sound moral grounds by himself.¹⁷⁶ He grew up in a 'broken' family – his father had four wives, he was one of thirteen (half-)siblings and his mother moved away after his parents split up when he was only four years old. At university in Benin City, he got involved with the 'Black Axe', one of the Campus Cults¹⁷⁷ he had always felt a strange attraction for. He likens Campus Cults to youth gangs in London regarding the peer pressure and "killing games". Isaac's engagement with the Black Axe cost him his university education and almost his life. Isaac did not tell me why exactly he came to London, but emphasises that along with his re-birth in Christ, only his coming to London made a distance from the violence of the cult possible. It is against this background that he aspires to establish a 'Christian home' for his children and emphasises the importance of a present father, who provides guidance and protection with his strictness. His own son is still a toddler, but he tries to use his own experience to impact positively on the British-born teenagers in church.

It is likely that the parents who resort to the 'Nigerian' methods of their own upbringing complicate their relationships with their children. After all, the latter grow up in a society where physical violence as well as Christian values are deeply unpopular and often linked to unlawful 'abuse' rather than a means to rectify the 'lack of respect' of children towards adults. Often, the children have never been to Nigeria, and what for their parents is 'home', their offspring think of as a 'backward' and 'poor' country.¹⁷⁸

¹⁷⁵ Interview, 24-09-2009.

¹⁷⁶ Interview, 29-06-2009.

¹⁷⁷ 'Campus Cults' are mostly all-male secret associations, similar to fraternities, but involving spiritual practices and often violent behaviour. They are usually associated with certain Universities, but draw their members from circles beyond those. See also Bastian (2001b).

¹⁷⁸ Informal conversation with Pastor Olawale's seventeen year old son and twenty-two year old daughter. Fieldnotes 11-04-2009.

They may not understand or even ridicule their parents' nostalgia for Nigerian social conditions.¹⁷⁹ Their parents' relatives are dispersed in different countries and it is difficult to transmit the concept of extended families that the parents may have grown up with.

Discipline

Like self-discipline and submission/responsibility, 'discipline' is at the core of practices that aim to (re)produce a Pentecostal spiritual and social order and Pentecostal selves. Requests for more discipline towards children occur in other contexts such as British schools or in the wider Nigerian diaspora, too. But among Nigerian Pentecostals, discipline is used in a distinctive way. Embedded in religious practice, disciplining takes a particular shape and becomes an act of faith. As some kind of benign dictators, male Christian authorities – God, pastors and fathers – are in charge of applying discipline.

In the RCCG worldwide, members are punished in public for wrongdoings. Church workers who fail to attend their meetings are eventually excluded from their departments and have to sit in the back rows for a period of time. Especially 'sinful' sexual activity ('fornication and adultery') are not taken lightly, but also late-coming or gossip against members or leadership are punished. The particular cases and methods of punishments are determined by the GO Adeboye in Nigeria. Both, Smith's (2007) and Marshall's (2009) work point to the long discourse around 'discipline' to combat corruption in Nigeria. However, Nigerian politics has failed society for many decades despite many regimes clinging onto the promise to erase the immorality and 'greed'. Since the 1990s, Pentecostalism joined the list of those who promise to 'really' tidy up and those who pin their hopes for moral improvement on the church, welcome strict morality and sanctions for wrongdoings.

¹⁷⁹ I have often seen second generation Nigerians doing parodying impersonations of their parents, pastors, or relatives visiting from Nigeria.

In a family context, discipline is also a means to achieve moral improvement, to establish a stable ‘Christian consciousness’ in children which lasts their whole life. It is seen as the key to counter the negative moral influence of ‘corrupt’ environments such as London.

Now if you had a good moral upbringing from home and you move into a new environment, that environment cannot change you, but you can change the environment. You won’t allow the environment to influence you. (...) based on your moral upbringing – is it Christ-like? Is it just a wayward life back home and you’ve now migrated yourself over here? You will still be living the same life. ...You understand me? ...But if you have that spiritual moral upbringing from back home and you move into this environment, nothing can change you, nothing whatsoever. Nothing can change you because you know where you’re coming from, and you know you have a focus, you have a vision of what you’ve come here for. So it is now left for you just to focus on that.¹⁸⁰

Deacon Gideon’s words show that children eventually develop their own will and drive forward (“you have migrated yourself over here”). But to walk focused on the journey of life, in the right direction, towards being someone influential (“you can change the environment”), they need a “good moral upbringing” at home to develop a strong focus. One on hand, children are perceived to be innocent; they do wrong things because they don’t know better. On the other hand, there seems to be a perception that children have a general tendency to be sinful. Adults thus have the responsibility to transmit moral standards. But they also ought to ensure children actually practise them and behave ‘correctly’.

One main aim of raising children into being disciplined born-again Christians is to keep them in the church.¹⁸¹ Another, more indirect aspect is to engage them in gendering processes that turn them into Pentecostal subjects: heterosexual manly men and womanly women. Femi’s brother Tunde suggested once that gender-specific toys (dolls for girls, guns and cars for boys) could be a means to make sure they do not ‘become’

¹⁸⁰ Interview with Gideon, 26-04-2009.

¹⁸¹ Pastor Olawale’s daughter is one example of a ‘second generation’ member. The young woman stayed engaged in church throughout her life. Her case is not necessarily representative though, and it would be interesting to investigate how many second generation youths refuse to go to church or e.g. attend other churches that they find more suitable.

homosexual.¹⁸² I have observed that girl children are encouraged to look pretty, have their nails painted, dress in smaller versions of their mothers' clothes and be friendly from a young age. At a birthday party of an RCCG member in London I pulled out my camera to take a picture of a female guest spoon-feeding her baby. Almost automatically, the little girl of perhaps twelve months of age stopped eating, turned towards me, sat up straight, crossed her legs, gave me a beaming smile and froze in this position until I had taken the picture (see Illustration 14).¹⁸³



Illustration 14: Baby girl
posing for a photo in London.

Practising Discipline with Children

Pentecostal discipline aims at establishing a divine social order through subjects who learn to act accordingly. “Discipline is doing ‘the right thing’; ‘the right thing’ is a

¹⁸² Interview, 19-05-2009.

¹⁸³ Fieldnotes, 13-09-2009.

never-ending process of negotiation informed by an apparent and contested, though always and already available, moral-aesthetic code.” (Collins 2008: 151) – in my case the ‘moral-aesthetic code’ of Pentecostalism.

How exactly moral practices such as a moral-aesthetic code of Nigerian Pentecostalism in general, and ‘discipline’ in particular are transmitted to the next generation is one of the big puzzles of social theory. In concepts such as Bourdieu’s habitus (see also Introduction) individual behaviour seems to be overwhelmingly influenced by social ‘dispositions’ and habitus is unable to account for social change and individual initiative (Collins 2008: 147-148, in reference to Bourdieu 1977:72). Based on her study of Muslim women in Cairo, Mahmood is equally unsatisfied with Bourdieu’s “failure to attend to pedagogical moments and practices in the process of acquiring a habitus [which] results in a neglect of the historically and culturally specific embodied capacities that different conceptions of the subject require” (Mahmood 2001: 838).

There are conscious acts of training involved in religious or moral behaviour. In the vignette that opened this chapter, Rachel’s little daughter self-evidently placed some coins on the offering tray, too. Her mother urges her to perform this gesture whenever she has money in her pocket. Rachel believes that such an embodied way of learning makes Pentecostal behaviour ‘normal’ to the girl and will later be complemented by an intellectual understanding of the economic and spiritual meanings of ‘giving’. In the training of Pentecostal behaviour such as speaking in tongues, there can sometimes be “an act of ‘denial’ involved to somehow suppress the knowledge that the transcendental experience is constructed” (Witte 2008: 27). In addition, RCCG members were also aware of the impact of a few ‘men of God’ like the GO, but tended to suspend the idea that pastors are (just) ‘men’ in favour of emphasising their divine calling. The constitution of a Pentecostal order involves ‘discipline’: the work of religious selves on themselves and others and collective ‘denials’ of knowledge around authority. Though it works collectively, it involves individual experience, agency and negotiations at a conscious level that Bourdieu’s habitus does not grasp. “[D]iscipline is the result of work done by either the individual and/or group and not an artefact of ill-defined structural processes” (Collins 2008: 149).

When my interviewees spoke of ‘disciplining children’ at home, they referred to a training process by the parents that lastingly promotes children’s individual efforts to practise Pentecostal Christian belief. This process is labour intensive and demanding for both, children and parents. Pentecostal behaviour in the child is best achieved by being self-disciplined Christian role models, as Gideon’s example of an interaction with his four year old son demonstrates.

There are times I can go astray and he [his son] corrects me of that which I have told him to do. Like there was the day I brought him his food and I went and I said: ‘Son, can you eat?’ He said: ‘But daddy, you didn’t pray!’ I said: ‘I’m sorry. - Can we pray?’ And we prayed over his food and he ate. That was basically it. So that was the correct... I made a mistake and he corrected me. If I had not taught him that way that each time a food is brought before you, before you eat make sure you pray.¹⁸⁴

Disciplining also involves coherence and the ‘necessary’ strictness. Children ought to learn to respect their parents’ authority, accept their decisions without asking or talking back. When his wife was in hospital, Femi only told his four year old daughter that she was ‘away’. To my astonishment, the girl seemed satisfied with this explanation. Similarly, I have not witnessed a parent giving a child a lengthy explanation why he/she has to go to bed or to his/her room, cannot have chicken and chips, etc. For all my interviewees, the process of disciplining includes punishment for deviance - mostly including the possibility of physical punishment. The degree and form of such physical punishment varied greatly though and was always said to be supplemented by ‘love’, ‘patience’ etc. Jesus House promotes a concept of discipline that suggests a somewhat more moderate hierarchy between parents and children and explicitly excludes physical ‘abuse’ – a model they also teach in ‘parenting classes’. Dami, a Lagos-born member of staff in charge of communications and the website, emphasises that this model is not less ‘Nigerian’ or more ‘British’. It is rather a more ‘progressive’ form of parenting. Jesus House being the largest RCCG parish and seat of the UK Overseer Agu Irukwu, this perception of childrearing may well be influential in other parishes in Britain. The former Campus Cult member and Tower of God Church Worker Isaac describes below

¹⁸⁴ Interview with Gideon, 26-04-2009.

how he educates his children in the 'way of the Lord' that emphasises strictness but does not focus on physical punishment.

Isaac: ...bringing up children is something that I like; and, um, the best way, especially in... in a place like England. ...You see, sometimes you're worried about children stabbing people, killing people in the street. Why? Because they're not being brought up in the proper way of the Lord.

Katrin: And your children are still very small [Joshua is four, his sister Esther is two], how do you do that? Do you find that they already have an understanding for that?

Isaac: You know children, there is... one good thing is: They... they are very good in copying, okay, and what they see you do is what they do.

Katrin: Yeah.

Isaac: And what they hear you say is what they say.

Katrin: Mm hmm.

Isaac: And sometimes we want to pray and I say to Joshua: 'Oh Joshua, come let's start this praying time.' And we'll be singing and clapping hands; and the little girl she will be singing... she don't know the songs, she will just hear, chewing her mouth saying whatever she's saying, dancing and everything. And when it's time to pray I tell Joshua: 'You have to pray'. And he will just close his... most of the things you see him saying is probably some he has heard us saying in the course of prayer and some ...he will just be adding his own. And there was... and whenever I want to teach him his book [homework] and I will say to him: 'Joshua, what is the first thing we do?' He will say: 'We pray!'. You understand it now? Before I teach him his book, err, I make him to come together, to say: 'Oh God I want you to come and teach me, give me the understanding to understand what I want to do...' - so we pray. And then: 'Okay Joshua, it's your turn then, you pray then.' He will say: 'Okay. Father come and teach me my book, amen. Father, guide my daddy, amen.' He's the one saying these! 'Father...' - He's the one saying 'amen' as well. He's the one saying: 'Father guide my mummy, amen. Father, guide Esther, amen. Father guide, ...err, ...um, ...Joshua, amen. Father, ...' - there's a girl he's normally plays with; he will say: 'Father guide Rachel, amen.' You understand it now? 'Father give all the... Help us to eat our food and if I want to eat my noodles,...' You know he would... anything that comes to his mind he adds in to the prayers, you understand it now? It's a good legacy for him. (...)

Katrin: And do you, um, also teach them the Bible? The contents of the Bible with their...?

Isaac: When he was... when he was... before he was two I bought him a Bible, okay, children's Bible with pictures on the inside.

Katrin: Okay, yeah.

Isaac: And, um, I gave it to him when he was two. Eh! You know children, they try to tear books into pieces - but this one: he has tried!... The Bible, if I show it to you now, at least you... you would have believed that he should have done more damages to it than the way it is at the moment. He have [sic] only just ripped the front cover off and tear just about one or two pages in the insides - which is very good, you understand me now? And, um, he knows that it is a book that he shouldn't tear. Whenever we want to do like a morning devotion in the house, when we want to read the Bible he says: 'Daddy...' , where's his Bible? You know? I will stand up and go and give him his Bible and he handles it with care, you understand not to tear it and I tell him: 'Hold that Bible very well, don't tear that Bible!' And he says: 'Daddy I will never tear it!' You understand me now. He... he's just part of those things. I don't come to read the Bible to him. No, no, no. We don't do those ones yet but whenever I want to... we want to pray in the house we must get the attention of everybody. We must stop whatever we're doing.¹⁸⁵

Such training starts early, when a baby is only a few months old. Isaac's and other interviewee's statements suggest that it mostly consists of repetitions and adopting habits – largely in an embodied way. The children learn to *ritualise* their lives and develop a Pentecostal lifestyle without being aware of the bigger spiritual context within which this happens.¹⁸⁶

Frictions with the British State over Physical Forms of Discipline

Nigerian Pentecostal calls for stricter discipline resonate with many suggestions in wider British society about how to tackle antisocial behaviour and violence among the youth. In this context, the RCCG parishes are seen as a 'community organisation' fit for collaboration to advance 'social cohesion'. Invitations to special church services where the congregation prays for social 'healing' and protection of London were often

¹⁸⁵ Interview, 29-06-2009. We have used part of this quote in Maier and Coleman (forthcoming).

¹⁸⁶ I do not wish to deny the traumatic effects that physical forms of discipline can have on children, but would like to suggest that there may be a logical correspondence between the embodied way of learning and physical measures of punishment.

honoured by police, members of parliament and local authorities. However, the inclusion of physical punishment is at odds with liberal ideas of participatory child education and the British state's interpretation of the protection of children's rights. After some high profile cases of child neglect and abuse have emerged in relation to exorcism practices in Pentecostal churches, Social Services, police and school teachers have been highly alert to the actions of African Christians in the UK (see also Introduction). This stigmatisation of African Christianity is somewhat coupled with a generalized negative reputation of Nigerians as criminal and fraudsters (see also Introduction).

As a reaction, African/Black churches have come under scrutiny by state and local authorities. The Metropolitan Police in Southwark as well as the Borough of Lewisham have for example faith liaison officers. Unsurprisingly, 'safeguarding children' is one of their areas of work.¹⁸⁷ In spite of being supposed to function as a 'bridge person' and establish a relationship of trust, Katie Miller from the Metropolitan Police implicitly distinguished between pastors that are willing to cooperate and those who use their authority to veil their activities towards the police. Among other practices, 'disciplining children' by African Christians has become problematic and suspicious per se. Through faith liaison officers like Miller, the British state tries to prevent certain Pentecostal practices while simultaneously maintaining a liberal doctrine of tolerance.

Rijk van Dijk (2001) analyses the case of trafficked Nigerian women who were forced into prostitution in the Netherlands by a criminal network of Nigerian madams and pimps. However, they refused to be 'rescued' by the Dutch police – allegedly because they felt bound by 'voodoo rituals'. The 'moral panic' with which the Dutch public reacted to the 'voodoo victims' sheds light on agency-denying projections on migrants and Dutch national immigration discourses rather than on trafficking itself. "More than child prostitution as such, (...) the combination with an African occult form of religion in particular made it feel as if the entire civil society of the Netherlands was in jeopardy" (Dijk 2001: 566).

¹⁸⁷ Interview with Katie Miller (Metropolitan Police), 07-10-2008, conducted jointly with Simon Coleman; and interview with Alison Licorish (Lewisham Council), 05-09-2008.

Like the Dutch civil society needs helpless girls to be rescued, the British state, too, aims at the production of a particular type of citizen. British policies that aim at ‘integration’, such as multiculturalism or social cohesion, reinforce a conceptual distance between *immigrants* and *autochthones* (Wimmer 2007: 7). As it is up to the British society to decide in which ways migrants ought to integrate, it always involves an imbalance of power. Recognition in a multicultural society is only possible through a fixation of immigrants’ identities as *other* (Kapila 2002). Similarly to the Dutch case that van Dijk describes, concerns about Nigerian Christian practices of ‘child discipline’ are thus revealing about boundary drawing practices of the British state. They involve the *othering* of particular immigrants in favour of a specific vision of British members of society.

This negative perception stands in contrast to Pentecostals’ own views. In Marshall’s study the complex intertwining of the Pentecostal and nationalist projects for Nigeria, the RCCG and Pastor Adeboye are prominent examples for Pentecostalism’s *political spirituality*. GO Adeboye perceives born-again Christians as a new, morally sound, type of citizen (2009: 112). The conversion of governments and the elites is crucial to ‘heal the land’ (ibid: 125): “[I]f we can bring the light of Jesus Christ to the top, once all is well at the top, it will soon be well downstairs” (E. A. Adeboye quoted in ibid.: 181). Similarly to the mother church in Nigeria, to achieve global conversion (rather than ‘immigrant integration’) the RCCG makes institutional efforts to be seen as ‘corporate citizen’ in the UK (Ukah 2009: 116), for example by being deliberately transparent and collaborative.

However, citizenship in this sense is something rather different from a British legal definition. More fitting is Levitt and Glick Schiller’s concept of *social citizenship*.

While states grant membership through laws that accord legal citizenship and nationality, people also make demands of states regardless of their legal status. Therefore, persons without full citizenship may act as substantive or social citizens, claiming rights or assuming privileges that are, in principle, accorded to citizens (2004: 1024).

On one side, the production of specific citizens of the British nation state becomes particularly important at this current time when the state outsources many of its functions. If the government will no longer produce the ‘good’ society through direct intervention, then it will produce the ‘good’ citizens who can. The British policies are “steering individual citizens to adopt subject positions, conceptions of themselves, and appropriate conduct, seemingly through their own choice and free will – in Foucault’s terms, through the governance of the self” (Wright 2008: 89). In their article about regulatory measures in Danish preschools concerning language competence policies, Bundgaard and Gulløv note that the regularisation of childcare is at the core of the state’s regime of discipline: “Childcare institutions function as civilising agents that produce ‘good’ citizens. This production builds on dominant norms of behaviour that guide children throughout their lives, a guidance that can be seen as a disciplinary measure” (2008: 43).

On the other side, the RCCG and their members aim to raise their children primarily as citizens of the ‘Kingdom of God’. “Discipline embodies a mission to create and install order, one or another version of which is deemed to be beneficial. Thus disciplinary projects, with all their aspirations, problems, and contradictions, mirror more general elements of the overarching humanistic project of social production, regulation and reproduction” (Dyck 2008: 15). In both instances - the nation state and the RCCG - childcare is the key means to mould particular subjects; it is no wonder that frictions emerge where methods, values and aims differ. The discourse around physical abuse of children in policies, media and churches then emerges not only aiming at the protection of children, but also as much a battlefield around the place of religion in the liberal state and a clash of two *regimes of discipline* (Dyck 2008).

Encapsulation as a Reaction to Parental Disempowerment

As a result of the discourse around child discipline and measures of state institutions such as the Home Office, Social Services and schools, the majority of the RCCG members I spoke to feel that the state erodes the family as institution. Simultaneously, they feel profoundly disempowered in relation to taking charge of building their

families in daily life by child protection and immigration legislation and stereotyping mechanisms.¹⁸⁸

This sense of disempowerment in relation to the British state and the fear of potentially fatal consequences are depicted in a theatre play, written by a Tower of God member and performed in several RCCG parishes during my research.¹⁸⁹ In the play, a gardener gives two married couples one potentially extremely productive vine each, with the instructions to prune them from the beginning. One couple applies the instructions strictly. Their vine grows into a productive plant with moderate growth – to their joy and material benefit. When the plant of the other couple grows a little, the wife pleads with the husband not to cut the tender vine back. The husband gives in, but soon the growth gets out of control. The vine grows into a tree and exceeds the wall around their garden. The vine-tree becomes visible to the outside and attracts the attention of ‘Mr. Smith’ from the local authority. He prohibits the couple from pruning the plant because it provides shade for the public space on the other side of the wall. As soon as it projects over the wall, it becomes public property, he says: that is the law of the land. Soon after, though, the plant has grown so much that the council decides to cut it down entirely. In interviews, the author and his wife¹⁹⁰ explain that the gardener is God, while the vine stands for his gift of children for the two Christian couples who know about the instructions to handle God’s gift. The pruning is the application of ‘discipline’ to raise the children in the Lord. It may hurt, but is necessary to control their development and maximise their potential. If this method is not applied, they grow in an undesired way and end up getting their parents and themselves into trouble with the state.

The play suggests an encapsulation of the family behind the wall that surrounds their home as the solution to prevent parental disempowerment. Discipline (‘pruning’) ensures that the plant does not attract ‘Mr. Smith’s’ attention. Examples such as this seem to support Vasquez’s view of immigrant religion and church institutions as

¹⁸⁸ Virtually all Nigerians I have met in London have had negative experiences with British state-related institutions - mostly the Home Office, Social Services, the police and schools. Narratives about court hearings, passport controls in the street, children being taken away, arrests and deportations circulate among the RCCG members and feature in sermons. Such incidents are dreaded as highly disruptive, shame- and painful.

¹⁸⁹ For a deeper analysis of this example see Maier and Coleman (forthcoming).

¹⁹⁰ 25-05-2009 and 25-07-2009.

counter publics, as “alternative spaces of sociability in tension with the normalising power of the state’ (2008: 171). In this view, the Nigerian Pentecostal family becomes a parallel ‘alternative’ that potentially contradicts ‘integration’ into a host society. However, if we look closer at our case of RCCG morality, the encapsulation of Pentecostal ‘homes’ is determined by more factors than the migrant situation and does not serve explicitly to create a counter public. It is linked to a wider *mode* of drawing boundaries to create a safe and familiar space of belonging. Botticello shows that the boundary drawing between an outside and an inside in the process of making a ‘home’ among Yoruba Londoners is strikingly similar in different contexts, in her case at a market stall and in a flat. “[H]ome is conceived not as a specifically situated place but as a site of practices where comfort, familiarity, and intimate sociality occur. Homemaking is to do with lived experience with particular persons among whom one can feel a sense of belonging” (2007: 19). For our context, we may think back to the spiritual practice of home-making in the case of the prayer circle at Sarah and James’ wedding (described in Chapter Six).¹⁹¹

Encapsulation can be a measure of survival and protection against the unpredictability of any nation state. RCCG members have learned this in a non-migration situation, vis-à-vis their ‘own’ state in Nigeria. To compensate for the failings of the Nigerian state, e.g. to supply infrastructure, work and security, homes rely on generators, personal networks and privately hired guards. Especially in Lagos, rather than social services, it is armed robbers who are perceived to threaten the family space. During my research in Lagos I stayed with a married couple, Toyin and Samuel. They are both Lagos born and lived in the city for most of the thirty-something years of their lives. They are longstanding and committed RCCG members and in-laws of Nigerian Pentecostals whom I knew in London. Their flat was on the second floor, but the building was openly accessible from the street. They kept the flat door locked, even when they were inside. When I was going to let someone in after I had heard them knocking, Toyin nervously shouted at me because I had not asked who it was. She later suggested that even that was risky: armed robbers trick people into opening the door for them by letting the neighbour knock on their behalf at gunpoint. Toyin’s reaction is symptomatic

¹⁹¹ Interestingly, in all cases some kind of material boundary shields the ‘inside’ from the gaze of outsiders: the garden wall in the play, locked bedroom doors in flats, tarpaulin at the market stall and the fortress of bodies in the prayer circle.

of a widespread and constant fear of criminal attacks on the space or finances of the 'home'.¹⁹²

Bearing the Nigerian background in mind, the example of the RCCG members in London suggests that the relationship between religious community and the state is more complex than the encapsulated immigrant scenario Vasquez describes. It is not the difference in moral values or practices per se that creates the 'garden wall' between Pentecostal community and the state; migrants do not 'naturally' wish for a distinct counter public. Encapsulation is embedded in issues of (mis-)trust and (in-)security towards (any) state authorities, represented in the play by Mr. Smith. It happens when the differences between Pentecostal 'inside' and worldly 'outside' become loaded with questions of power and authority and create frictions between two regimes of discipline. RCCG members resort to boundary drawing mechanisms that were experienced in Nigeria in an attempt to restore migrants' authority in the face of structural disempowerment that stands in stark contrast to the promises of upward mobility that Pentecostalism offers. The practice to send children 'back home' to Nigeria for their teenage years, is one form of encapsulation of the Pentecostal home in reaction to the clash of Pentecostal and British regimes of discipline. People like Rachel and Jacob aim at withdrawing their offspring from the morally negative influences of the British state and society. They send children like Stephen into a particular corner of the transnational London-Lagos space, where they feel that Pentecostal ideals of family and formation of the self is better catered for (see Illustration 15).

¹⁹² It also seems to me that her shouting as a reaction, which frightened me, is symptomatic of how this fear is constantly reproduced.

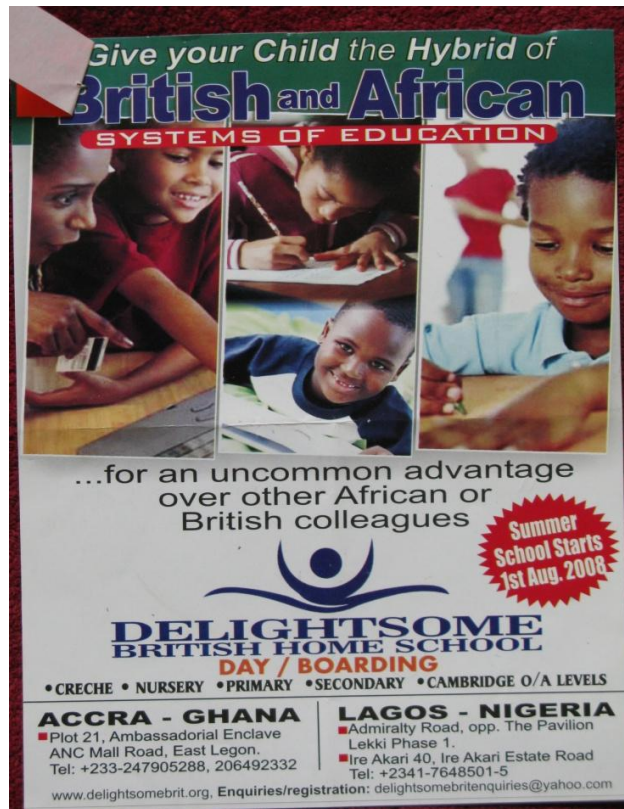


Illustration 15: Flier advertising boarding schools
in Nigeria and Ghana. Distributed in London.

Conclusion

Using the example of Rachel and Jacob's family home and in particular the dynamics around cooking and eating have shown how a gendered order is negotiated flexibly but without eroding the 'biblical' ideal of the man as head and the women as his support. The 'mother-and-wife' is constructed as the main carer for the family members' needs. The 'father-and-husband' is in charge of enforcing a Pentecostal morality in the children through disciplining them. Gideon and Isaac's examples showed that 'disciplining' is mainly an embodied process of Pentecostalising children's lifestyles from an early age. Because this may potentially include measures of physical discipline, the British state institution aims at monitoring African Pentecostals' child rearing. As a reaction, Pentecostal parents resort to a further encapsulation of the family space, using modes

that they are familiar with from dealing with the Nigerian state. For example in work life, however, RCCG members must negotiate a restricted labour market. Here, the possibility for encapsulation towards British society is limited. The next chapter looks at the shape which the interaction between Nigerian Pentecostals and the wider society takes in this area of life. Financial well-being is necessary for the reproduction of Pentecostal selves and the outreach into London. Like in the negotiation of the family space, RCCG members are by no means passive. They use Pentecostal morality and 'Nigerian' modes as resources to realise spiritual and material goals.

Chapter Eight

Navigating Tensions Between Moral Regimes

Katrin: What is 'fornicating' exactly?

Danny: It is having sex with anybody that comes your way. When you see a fine girl like this, you just want to grab her, lie to her, so that you can have sex with her.

Katrin: Ok. What about having a stable relationship but you are not married ...?

Danny: That's what I am saying. Err... if you have a stable relationship and you have... and you are sure you are gonna get married, there is nothing to stop for people to have.... when it is from the heart. It is still fornication, because Bible doesn't really agree to it, but for me, I don't really see it as fornication because the girl you are gonna get married to and I love her so much, I will not want her to go, I will tell her... I will engage her, maybe take her to the registry, then, you can have what he or she wants. Understand? If she wants it, then I give it to her, but I would rather, ... make it known to her that I will never leave her. Because as I am here now, I told you yesterday, believe it or not, for almost 8 years, I have never moved closer to any woman. Anyone that I want to move closer now, I have to be very sure that I am gonna marry her. That is why I don't want to... I want to take my time and look for the one that I really love from my heart.

Katrin: And if a non-believer whom you found morally sound, asks you, let's say, to do a flier for a rock concert, would you do it or not?

Danny: A rock concert? Why not?! That's business!

Katrin: Even though yesterday you said that rock [music] can be somehow devilish?

Danny: The concept behind the song ... and some of the artists, some of the rock artists, some of them put tattoo, their look is always devilish. This is not now... this is business. That doesn't have anything to do with me and the artist himself. It is the artist's appearance that I am talking about now. The way they scream that thing, they want to pull everywhere down.

Katrin: What... the anger is devilish?

Danny: The anger, the way they are singing that song. Bah, bah! That is what I mean. I didn't mean that ...

Katrin: But would you mind to put his photograph, even if it shows his tattoo?

Danny: His photograph doesn't affect me. If he wants to have his photograph, that is how he wants to be, his photo doesn't communicate with me, it doesn't affect me, I do it and I get my money out of it and I go. That is why many people I met don't really like preaching today. You know why? They are tired of preaching because they want to know the kind of person you really are. If they see the kind of person you are, they want to move closer to you.

Katrin: Do you think that that is particularly true in the UK? Is that more true in the UK than...

Danny: You mean their character...?

Katrin: No, that people are tired of preaching.

Danny: Most people are tired of preaching.

Katrin: In the UK more than in Nigeria?

Danny: They want to see the practical things that you can do. How you can affect lives.

Katrin: Is that the same in Nigeria?

Danny: No, in UK, mostly in UK. It's more ... it's the same there [Nigeria] to a certain extent. But preaching still works very, very well in Nigeria. Very, very good. But in the UK, the white people don't want to see you and talk ... they are tired of it. What you can do is what they wanna see. If you can affect lives, they are ready to follow you. That is what I am trying to do.¹⁹³

This sequence stems from the second recorded interview I had with Danny, towards the end of my main research period. At this point, he was open about his own ambivalences and inner conflicts – aspects which other interviewees preferred to conceal. All three topics - premarital relationships, doing business and evangelising in the UK – reflect the rigid principles of conduct in Pentecostal doctrine. Believers are meant to take their

¹⁹³ Interview with Danny, 16-08-2009. The interview was conducted in the church auditorium, but with no one else present. Grammatical irregularities in original.

‘place’ in this Pentecostal morality that is regulated through obedience, discipline and self-discipline.

Previous chapters have shown how such issues of morality are negotiated within a Pentecostal church and family framework. This chapter widens this scope and considers practices of RCCG members and their families in interaction with spheres of life that are not explicitly shaped by Pentecostalism but cannot be avoided. Focussing on public space and work life, it assesses how RCCG members set the different moralities that govern these spaces in relation to Pentecostal beliefs.¹⁹⁴ On one hand, RCCG members seek to Pentecostalise such areas in the UK through direct or indirect missionisation attempts. On the other hand, where different moralities persist, RCCG members use analytical and behavioural modes to navigate the contradicting requirements of different relevant authorities. In such situations, where compromising can be a matter of economic survival, Pentecostals’ moral practice allows for flexibility in regard to what exactly is ‘right’ and what is ‘wrong’.

Confronted with the situations I ask Danny to imagine in the interview, he decides without hesitation how to adapt Pentecostal morality to everyday practice: pre-marital sex needs certain pre-conditions to be acceptable, doing business with a ‘devilish’ person is alright and speaking the Word can be substituted by ‘living’ it to evangelise. There is of course a possibility that what Danny says in the interview differs from what he would actually do, or that I would have elicited a different answer had I asked at a different occasion. Furthermore, other RCCG members may find Danny’s approaches controversial or ‘wrong’. For my argument below, however, it is not the result of his considerations that is important; it is the way in which he stretches biblical principles without transgressing them.

I do not suggest that such morally loaded decisions are easy; but people are trained to judge a situation, other people and their intentions correctly, weigh different possibilities, aspects and consequences and react boldly and calmly, in a way that minimises moral frictions and maximises personal benefits. The ability to do this

¹⁹⁴ Unfortunately, the scope of this thesis does not allow me to include gendering processes in such processes of moral and material reproduction outside the church and the home to the same extent as in the previous chapters.

particularly ‘well’ I call *smartness*. Smartness is a mode of advancement aiming at the positive transformation of one’s destiny. It is trained, yet situational and spontaneous. It is exercised in a creative process with room for re-adjustment. Though highly tinted by collective morality, and influenced by moral discourses in Nigeria, smartness is individual. As a Pentecostal mode of reacting it depends on ongoing moral self-analysis. The term smartness seems appropriate to me because it embodies a broad spectrum of possible behavioural strategies¹⁹⁵ to achieve one’s interests, ranging from a prim and proper holiness lifestyle that persuades God into helping the believer, to the ‘wicked’ conscious deception of fellow humans.¹⁹⁶

Sowing and Reaping

The RCCG provides members not just with a social network that can help advance one’s destiny in practical and material terms. It also promises that Jesus’ disciples can tap into God’s spiritual power when feeling stuck. Personal problems such as difficulties in finding a spouse, having children or obtaining greater wealth are tackled through Pentecostal tools such as Bible reading, prayers, fasting, deliverance, spiritual warfare and various ways of working for God or pleasing Him. Which type or combination of spiritual ‘treatments’ is adopted depends on recommendations by pastors or family members, as well as on the experiences and decisions of the believer him/herself.

In this process, God’s power is constructed as superior and independent from humans. It is accessed by being ‘re-born in Jesus’ and ‘leading a Christian life’ - obeying God and having faith in Him. Since the 1990s, a particular version of ‘health and wealth gospel’ has been increasingly influential in Pentecostalism all over the world (see e.g. for Sweden Coleman 2000; for the USA Frederick 2003; for West Africa Gifford 1990). It emphasises that God wishes His people to have a good life here on earth, not just in the

¹⁹⁵ I use ‘strategy’ here not in a sense that is based on an essentialist notion of rationality, but rather as a practice to identify and focus on the fulfilment of a goal.

¹⁹⁶ The term *smartness*, as I define it here, is my own. It includes, but exceeds meanings of being ‘street-smart/wise’, ‘church-smart’, presenting oneself in a ‘neat’ way or having had ‘exposure’ through migration that my interviewees occasionally used.

afterlife. In a Yoruba related interpretation these good things are mainly children, good health, wealth and 'peace' (Botticello 2009a, Cornwall 1996, Doubleday 2008).

The rise of prosperity-oriented Pentecostal churches in Nigeria since the mid 1980s is embedded in the context of economic crisis as well as widespread corruption (see Marshall 2009: 102-127; Smith 2007: 209ff). Like many political anti-corruption campaigns, Pentecostalism identifies moral decay as the root of both. Instead of political and social solutions, the RCCG promotes spiritual practice as the area of action to improve society's moral standards. God is constructed as the only truly honest and reliable being and not vulnerable to humans' deception, so that surrendering to Him is the only way to achieve social and personal stability and wealth.

The concept of the Pentecostal *faith economy* (Botticello 2009a: 153) among Nigerians in London is based on the presumption that increasing obedience and faith will result in a closer relationship with God, which in turn enables access to more of His power, wisdom, an increase in success and 'good life' and a reduction of satanically caused misfortune. Through 'giving' (or 'sowing', to use the Pentecostal metaphor), believers invest in the relationship with God - to receive ('reap') later. 'Sowing a seed' can take spontaneous and immaterial forms, such as labour, worship practices such as dancing and singing or being friendly and helpful towards others. However, giving monetary offerings and especially regular tithing¹⁹⁷ is seen as a basic must. Public 'testifying' about the good things that God has done in one's life is a big part of the exchange with God, too. Testimonies are a *technique of the self* (Marshall 2009: 46, 154ff) where believers develop a narrative about them as Pentecostals that can be an encouraging example for others. But testimonies are also delivered in the consciousness that their praises for His deeds will please God.

'Declaring' or 'decreeing' is important to release the good things into the believers' lives. In sermons, informal meetings and individual or collective 'fervent' prayers and Bible studies of the 'promises' that God has given this is often re-iterated over and over.

¹⁹⁷ 'Tithing' means donating a tenth of one's monthly income to the church. It is controversial in Nigerian Pentecostalism whether 'income' means gross or net wages/business profits and whether it includes social benefits, gifts etc. This debate is linked to the suspicion that some pastors put God's money into their own pocket.

On one hand this attitude demonstrates believers' confidence and trust in God's reliability. On the other hand, uncertainty is expressed implicitly. The fulfilment is not automatic: words need to be spoken (or screamed) before they happen, and sometimes I gained the impression that God may almost need some reminding.

These two mass text messages from Isaac sum up some aspects of how believers are tied into a faith economy system.

Pls THINK today as a MILLIONAIRE, d kind of CAR u will drive, House u will LIVE, number of CHILDREN u will have. as a MAN thinks in his heart so is he. please know these u are not BORN to fail neither are u CREATED to live he way u are now, GOD is upgrading ur life now. RCCG TOWER OF GOD. See u at the vigil

Those good things dat should have been urs but 4 some reasons u lost dem, D lord is digging them up 4 ur good. GOD is out in full force to surprise U these month. Ur enemies/those who have denied u ur rights are In very BIG TROUBLE (ISIAH 42:13-14) RCCG TOWER OF GOD¹⁹⁸

Everyone is identified as spiritually burdened by demonic 'pressure', 'reasons' and 'enemies' that work against the progress they desire: 'breakthrough', millions, big house, fancy car and children. The solution is God, who 'upgrades', 'digs' and 'surprises' - but only if we obtain a doubt-free, bold mindset and have faith and trust in God's ability and intentions, as well as to make some effort such as to go to vigils.

Bodily forms are important to secure material and social divine 'blessings'. At the biannual Festival of Life in London, GO Adeboye's presence is usually by far the biggest attraction. During his sermons he often interrupts himself to announce a revelation with words such as 'my father has just told me that: someone in your family will have a testimony!' or: '...that God will restore your marriage'. Around 30,000 attendants answer by screaming 'amen!!!' at the top of their lungs. Rhythm, speed, tone,

¹⁹⁸ Isaac sends such text messages on behalf of the church, but the specific emphasis on God's agency and the believer's obedience is somewhat typical for him personally. Text messages received on author's phone, 03-12-2009 and 15-09-2009. All orthographic irregularities in original.

direction and volume of the preacher's voice regularly trigger people to jump up from their seats to catch the prophecy in the air above their head with their stretched-out hand. This creates the impression that words, once *externalised* (Coleman 2000: 131) from the GO's mouth are *things* (Coleman 1996), flying about in the room and just need be noticed and plucked. Sometimes, people seem to internalise the blessing they have caught through their skin into their head or chest with hand movements reminiscent of splashing water onto one's body. The urgency and speed of such gestures suggest an anxiety that someone quicker may snatch one's blessing away (see Illustration 16).¹⁹⁹



Illustration 16: Women catching blessings
at the Holy Ghost Night in Redemption Camp near Lagos.

Preacher, ministers and attendants work together to create a certain loaded atmosphere with rhythmical repetitions, which are increasingly transformed into a symphony of stretched vowels and hard consonants that remind me of bullets. The sound coming out of stretched necks from strained vocal chords is accompanied by jumping or stamping legs and feet, swaying torsos, as well as raised arms, hands clenched into fists or fingers

¹⁹⁹ E.g. fieldnotes, 28-03-2008. Such accounts also litter my notes on similar events in Europe and Nigeria.

spread out like antennae. Excited, emotional, smiling or withdrawn facial expressions accompany the vocal activity. What exactly people do, wrapped up in their individual concerns and prayers, seems like their very personal bodily prayer style. Simultaneously, however, there is a great sense of togetherness in which the individual prayer becomes a contribution to the enactment of a concerted spiritual effort by a united 'body of Christ', to create an atmosphere in the room that makes miracles more likely to happen than, say, at home.

In a home fellowship meeting Isaac once shared a personal experience of how such divine blessings manifest themselves later as solutions to our problems. He had asked a fellow parishioner to place an online order on his behalf. Isaac did not have a credit card himself, and was going to re-pay the money in cash. On the morning of our meeting, the person who had helped Isaac out brought the purchase to church. To Isaac's surprise, he did not want to be paid back, it was a gift. As Isaac and his family live off his small salary, he was grateful. However, he said that he was not really surprised. In his view God had rewarded him for previously doing similar favours to other people. In the logic of the faith economy, he had reaped what he had sowed, he simply benefitted from having previously been *smart* in a godly way.²⁰⁰

However, Isaac's testimony also shows that the linear sowing-and-reaping logic is complicated by the fact that one never knows when and from where blessings are going to come from. For someone like Isaac, this can make providing for their family's regular financial needs more difficult. Furthermore, believers often feel they are 'reaping' less or later than they ought to and this can lead people to adopting strategies beyond relying totally on God. To find out about why blessings are delayed, many sermons and personal reflections seek to shed light on God's 'mysterious ways' and the devil's tricks to ensure people's misery. Asking for God's forgiveness is necessary to nullify one's own or one's ancestors' conscious and unconscious wrongdoings. Prayers of 'spiritual warfare' are the means to control the devil's effects on one's life: in a verbal and bodily act, often using a military imagery, believers spiritually go into the

²⁰⁰ Fieldnotes, 12-07-2009.

‘enemy’s camp’ and take ‘back’ what rightfully belongs to them or cast evil spirits out of one’s life in deliverance.²⁰¹

The more believers are tuned into communicating with God (by reading the Bible, praying and having ‘open’ spiritual eyes and ears), the more God will guide them. Before sending off an application or handing in their notice, believers hope to hear the guiding voice of the Holy Spirit in dreams, visions and revelations, or as a quiet little inner voice of ‘conviction’²⁰² to help them make *smart* choices. Danny prays regularly for God’s divine inspiration. In an interview, he recalled that a few years back in Lagos, he had written a song that praised the Nigerian national football team in advance of the Africa Cup. However, he found it impossible to complete the words for the chorus. This song was important to him as a football lover and for his career, so he included the matter in his regular morning prayers. Soon, as he was walking down a street, his (spiritual) eyes were opened: he noticed a slogan that was written on the outside of a bus that passed him, providing him with the missing lyrics for his tune.²⁰³

Missionising (in) the UK

To ‘live holy’ and please God (and hence activate the circulation of divine prosperity), it is vital to evangelise. Believers are required to go beyond the boundaries of the otherwise potentially self-referential and self-sufficient ‘body of Christ’. They ought to interact with those who are not born-again and contribute to the ‘salvation’ of their souls through conversion. The duty to ‘reach out’ is based on a particular structure of authority: Pentecostalism is perceived as morally superior whereas worldly society is the recipient of the ‘good news’.²⁰⁴ Hence, the RCCG wants to attract people of all backgrounds.

²⁰¹ See also Bastian 2003, Adogame 2005a; both use the Nigerian Pentecostal Mountain of Fire and Miracles Ministry as example.

²⁰² Forms of hearing from God are regularly discussed in an RCCG context, e.g. in a Bible study meeting of the Jesus House fellowship group I attended regularly. Fieldnotes, 11-12-2008.

²⁰³ Interview, 16-08-2009.

²⁰⁴ Note the direct inversion of this relationship in European policies that are concerned with the ‘integration’ of migrant others into a ‘majority’ society by means of a conversion to European ‘values’.

The spread of the RCCG and its message all over the globe is at the heart of the RCCG policy (see Chapter Four of this thesis and e.g. Ukah 2005a, Ukah 2009). Many RCCG pastors and members see it as their task – if not the reason why God sent them to Europe in the first place - to bring ‘back’ the Gospel to the nation that originally brought the Bible to Africa, but since then slid into spiritual and moral poverty. Sermons, for example in *Tower of God*, sometimes suggest that Christianity should ‘again’ become the state religion, part of the constitution and the basis for the rule of the UK, ‘like it used to be’ in Victorian times. In the religious studies literature, this is often referred to as ‘reverse mission discourse’.²⁰⁵ This body of literature points out that African Christian activity in Europe turns (post)colonial power relations on its head. Elsewhere, however, I criticise the underlying notion of reverse mission, which tends to glorify ‘African’ agency and buys into a notion of the superiority of Christian morals. More importantly, by equalising European missionisation in West Africa a hundred years ago with current African ‘re-mission’ of Europe, it also conceals the intertwining of European missionisation with a colonial project and fails to analyse the Nigerian Pentecostal ‘blind eye’ concerning the violence and deception committed by European missionaries in West Africa on a deeper level (Maier 2010, see also Knibbe forthcoming).

In most parishes, a group goes out at least once a month to do street evangelism that can involve public preaching, singing and distribution of leaflets or Bibles, talking to or praying with pedestrians.²⁰⁶ A more indirect way to promote born-again Christianity is to make a positive impact on people of all walks of life through showing them love and care. As an institution, the RCCG and its parishes engage in activities such as exchange, collaboration and contact with local authorities, associations and churches, promotes activities involving youth and older people, as well as materially deprived and ‘broken’ families.²⁰⁷ Privately, members also engage in street evangelism. Danny always has some leaflets with the details of the church in his bag, which he hands out in public, e.g. while waiting at a bus stop. More common individual attempts are to invite neighbours, work colleagues and friends to church services or to share one’s personal conversion story with them, in a more private context.

²⁰⁵ E.g. Ukah (2009); Hunt calls it ‘reversed proselytization’ (2002: 169).

²⁰⁶ In Southeast London I have only witnessed black passers-by agreeing to be publicly prayed for.

²⁰⁷ See Burgess et al. (2010) for a more elaborate assessment of the RCCG as a *social force*.

Social and material deprivation in both Nigeria and the UK serve as the contrasting backdrops against which the possibility of the Kingdom of God is particularly attractive – similar to the way that Redemption Camp appears to be ‘heaven’ against the backdrop of the nearby chaos and danger in Lagos (discussed earlier in Chapter Three). The ideal of the ‘Kingdom of God’ is envisaged as parallel to a worldly nation-state where God is a benign autocrat who governs His Kingdom citizens according to the laws of the Bible. It is complete with a government of ministers of God, a united people of born-again Christians, a territory, boundaries, a self-sufficient faith economy and an army of ‘soldiers of the cross’, waging war against the ‘enemy’. Christianised nation states are conceptualised as an instrumental sub-structure in this order. It is thus not the aim of the RCCG to dissolve the nation state, but to transform and incorporate it into a bigger, global structure that is the Divine Kingdom. The establishment of the Kingdom of God therefore becomes intimately intertwined with this-worldly nationalist projects.²⁰⁸

In Nigeria, the RCCG is a political player (see also Chapter Four). In December 2008, I was watching parts of the RCCG’s Holy Ghost Congress in Redemption Camp on a satellite channel in an RCCG parish’s office in London. The parish members who had invited me to join them frequently pointed out to each other the Nigerian politicians they could identify sitting in the first rows of the auditorium in Redemption Camp or following the GO’s altar call. The volunteer secretary remarked that this was a sign of Nigeria’s process of transformation into a better, godly country in which politicians’ actions were guided by God and pastors such as the GO.²⁰⁹ In Nigeria, as well as more recently in the UK, the RCCG is part of the ‘Nigeria Prays’ campaign that aims at a moral transformation and Christianisation of the Nigerian nation and which has been initiated by the former head of state General Gowon.²¹⁰

But RCCG members also think of Christianisation as a remedy for moral shortcomings in respect to the UK. Initially hoping to find a better life, many of the RCCG members I worked with are disappointed by life in Britain. They had anticipated modern glass

²⁰⁸ See also Marshall’s insightful analysis of GO Adeboye’s speech ‘Who Is On The Lord’s Side?’, delivered at the meeting of Pentecostal Fellowship of Nigeria (PFN) in 1993 (2009: 201-203).

²⁰⁹ Fieldnotes, 17-12- 2008.

²¹⁰ The official inauguration of ‘Nigeria Prays UK’ took place in RCCG Jesus House. Fieldnotes, 12-09-2008.

buildings instead of old terraced houses, derelict ‘bush land’ and dirty streets before they arrived in the city. They are shocked by the social problems in their neighbourhoods. However, for them they do not imply the failure of the British state to provide for its citizens; instead they attribute the deprivation to a crisis of moral values and ill-discipline. Rachel identified what she calls a ‘blame-culture’ in London: a tendency to point fingers and sue others instead of taking responsibility.²¹¹

Another source of disappointment involves the discrimination, racism and state violence in immigration legislation and policing practices. This mass text message was sent by an RCCG member to the members of his parish: “Brethren please stay away from PECKHAM THE IMMIGRATIONS ARE RAIDING PEOPLE AT PECKHAM RYE RIGHT NOW.”²¹² Perhaps as a result of the recent increase in criminalisation and stigmatisation of Nigerian immigrants in particular, the sense of pride in contributing to the British state that Fumanti (2010) describes for the context of Methodist Ghanaian migrants in London is not shared to the same extent by the RCCG members. Rather than needing to earn an entitlement as ‘virtuous citizens’, the RCCG members I spoke to seem to claim or ‘decree’ British (social) citizenship in addition to their Nigerian citizenship with a strong sense of entitlement on the basis of faith. Socially, they aimed to inhabit both the UK and Nigeria at the same time. All my interviewees are in close phone contact with their families in Nigeria - mostly their parents, siblings and in-laws. Those with reasonable incomes and a permanent stay permit travelled back and forth at least once a year for business, birthday parties, weddings and funerals. In spring 2009, a couple that I knew from ‘my’ Jesus House bible study group went to celebrate the husband’s mother’s seventieth birthday. Shortly afterwards, they went back again to pick up the husband’s father for medical treatment in the UK. However, those research participants without enough income and/or regularised ‘papers’ had often not seen their family for many years. Such people tended to interpret the lack of legal papers as a spiritual obstacle, immigration officers in charge as devil-controlled agents and they prayed ‘fervently’ against their actions.

²¹¹ Interview, 21-05-2009.

²¹² Received on author’s phone, 01-02-2011, 15.41h; capital letters in original.

The complex relationship between believers and the British state creates a tension between the encapsulation and the aim of ‘reaching out’ beyond the parish boundaries to convert individuals and the nation state. Even beyond the church as institution, individual church members feel limited in talking about their faith. Tayo and his wife Iris have been committed born-again Christians for a long time, attended RCCG in Lagos and used to evangelise in public there. They sought to implement this approach of spreading the Word in London and preached on the buses of the route 53 in Southeast London on Tayo’s days off. This is a popular way to evangelise in West Africa, but in London they were often asked to leave the bus. Knowing that it is likely that people may reject their approach, some interviewees - especially women - said that they are too shy to talk to people they did not know. Tower of God’s drama group member and Deacon Gideon’s wife Lizzy is one of those who is ‘bold’ enough to evangelise in the streets. However, she reports that her little son was so shocked by the rude rejections and people’s ‘hatred for the Bible’ that she no longer wants to take him along to her outreach activities. Now she has to arrange for childcare to be able to evangelise.²¹³

As a response, people resort to ways of missionising that do not make them feel silenced even though they do not approach people directly or use words at all. An emphasis on missionisation through prayers partly resolves this tension. For Pentecostals they cause change in the spiritual realm and ultimately trigger social transformations and the conversion of people in the material world. In church and at home, Pentecostals ask God for the protection of specific boroughs and the whole of London, for wisdom for the British government, for the restoration of the European economy and against specific laws and policies such as same-sex marriage legislation.

Another approach is what I call elsewhere *conversion by radiation* (Maier 2010).²¹⁴ Here, it is thought that non-believers will notice a believer’s faith through the effects it has on their (gendered) looks, moral behaviour and material situation. The wonder of others can then be used to explicate one’s faith. For this reason, Danny makes sure he is

²¹³ Interview, 26-08-2009.

²¹⁴ This includes the display of moral behaviour discussed in the previous chapters, such as moderate dressing, friendliness towards others, etc. Rabelo et al. describe a similar phenomenon in their article about Pentecostal women in Brazil (2009).

punctual for his appointments and dresses neatly to display how well God takes care of him.

[O]nce he [somebody in the street] sees that you dress smart and you are riding your Hummer jeep or very nice car and when you tell somebody 'God is good' – that person will want to listen to you! Because they can see it all over you that the God you serve is good.²¹⁵

Parallel to commercial advertisement strategies, Tower of God usher Tayo suggests meeting people's emotional needs as a way to demonstrate the positive effect of the Gospel, rather than talking to them about Jesus.

Gospel sharing can also be like the marketing effort. If you are a marketer, you should be able identify the needs of your customer or your client and then provide solutions to their needs, then it sinks in more to them, okay? There are lots of people that go through emotional trauma, even in our places of work, okay? So it's always those types I think it is the first point of calls for a good "marketing-Christian" – in quotes -, because if someone is going through the emotional trauma you could talk to them, you could let them know ... because we have been through one emotional stress or the other before. (...) People go through loads and loads of things in this country, so if you are, if you are close to anyone, they love to share their concerns with you... Even by merely asking 'oh you are not looking too happy today, what's happened to you?'²¹⁶

Evangelising by radiation is a *smart* mode to missionise under the particular circumstances in the UK. It not only deepens one's own faith through heightened self-discipline, it also seduces people into conversion without explicitly talking about Jesus. They overcome regulations concerning British public space as well as a common hostility towards religiosity by being silent without losing their voice. And even if they do not convert actual people in great numbers, they radiate God's power into their environment and indirectly transform it spiritually and socially.

²¹⁵ Interview, 19-05-2009

²¹⁶ Interview, 25-07-2009.

Doing Business

Prosperity teachings influence the management of finances, the work ethic and the practices of doing business among Nigerian Pentecostals in London. Especially when the economical downturn hit the UK economy from autumn 2008, the possibility of divine assistance and financial miracles was frequently emphasised in church services and other meetings. If one was clever, one could even make profit out of the crisis.²¹⁷ But because of the inherent ambivalence between individual responsibility and obedience to God the mechanisms of such a faith economy are straightforward only in doctrine, not in practice.

RCCG members sometimes need to compromise to meet requirements of worldly regimes. They may adopt 'non-Christian' modes of economic survival that are at their disposal and involve lying, deliberate manipulation and a certain toughness and ruthlessness in realising one's aim to make money. Because men are said to be emotionally stronger than women, such 'street'-smartness is mostly male connotated. Female variations are the deliberate manipulation and deception of men through sexual features and behaviour (Smith 2010: 133), the witty management of the transition into a 'good wife' by concealing a promiscuous sexual history (Smith 2010: 143) and the control of their fertility.²¹⁸

My Lagos born-and-bred friend Ronke is a lively, self-confident and enterprising Muslim Yoruba woman. She loves everything to do with style and fashion. In Lagos she used to run a medium sized successful hair salon. Selling her business made it possible for her to come to London. Her three children from previous relationships stay in Nigeria with her sisters. Since coming to London she has re-married. Her husband, who works as a clerk in a school, supports her financially, but she contributes by renting a chair in a hair salon in Peckham. When she was highly pregnant during my research, Ronke told her husband that she did not get any support from British Social Services

²¹⁷ Interestingly, the Nigerian economy is growing since 2008, despite the global downturn; BBC World Service report, 05-04-2011.

²¹⁸ Smith refers to a Southeastern Nigerian (Igbo) context, but see also Koster-Oyekan (1999) on the wide spread of the practice of induced abortion in Lagos.

even though they had given her vouchers, worth £500, for things that she would need for the baby. The (additional) money that her husband gave her to cater for the needs of the baby, Ronke used instead to buy herself clothes and particularly nice baby clothes that she otherwise would not have been able to afford. She told me that she was tired of only just ‘managing’. Ronke had told me that she had mainly agreed to have the baby to strengthen the bond with her husband. She is also her husband’s second wife, which also created a feeling of entitlement to some ‘luxury’ in exchange for the compromises she was making.

Most RCCG members I spoke to would not approve of such deception in the nuclear family and were therefore unlikely to tell me even if it did happen. But I was able to catch glimpses of street-smart morality being used if it promised to further one’s destiny. In the example given at the opening of this chapter, Danny cannot be sure whether keeping a woman by sleeping with her before a church wedding will get him closer to his aim (having a happy family), nor whether his reasoning will persist before God. But if she is the woman he ‘really loves from his heart’, *not* trying to ‘keep’ her would mean missing his chance. A decision in which he relies on his ‘knowledge’ that this is ‘not really’ fornication proves right, or that God’s mercy will apply if it turns out he has sinned.

Especially in practices of doing business, overlooking Pentecostal moral standards temporarily, in favour of some ‘street-/business-wisdom’, can be seen as necessary. In the case of his freelance graphic design work, Danny finds that he sometimes has to lie:

[W]hen you are doing jobs for people, at times there are some lies you just tell them. Most of the times when you tell them the truth, they don’t want to listen. But when you tell them lies, they will listen. And it’s not good! To run your own business. It’s kind of tricky. You have to tell lies. And it’s not good for you, a child of God. And you are trying to... But to all my customers, I stick to my word. (...) Ask anyone in church, they always respect me for that. They always respect me for that, that I always tell them the truth. ...But sometimes I need to tell some lies, just to cover my own... to cover my business. But it’s not all that good.²¹⁹

²¹⁹ Sometimes he asks for a higher price for his services, though, especially when he has had a low turnover and needs some extra money to cover his costs of living. Interview, 19-05-2009.

Danny's apparent incoherence reflects the contradictions that people like him face in a migration context in London. Residence and work permits and the formal labour market can be difficult to access. In an informal economy, clients and partners are not bound by contracts and can choose to 'not listen' and for example not to pay for services received. However, Danny tries to reduce the instances when he has to transgress Pentecostal morality. In situations like Danny's, where one is stuck between contradicting practical, legal and biblical requirements, it is not clear what the 'right' moral behaviour is. Danny and others rely on their personal analysis and situational 'smartness', in the art of working several moral systems, to be as successful as they can in *all* areas.

Smartness implies navigation between contradicting moral systems in a way that causes as little friction as possible and maximum benefit as the outcome. RCCG members seem surprisingly patient and understanding when others fail to strictly practice God's commandments and recommendations found in the Bible. Perhaps this attitude reflects the insight that the condition of being human must necessarily prevent us from being totally sin-free. Furthermore, I often observed a certain appreciation for the creativeness of others' unexpected ideas, surprising behaviour or a joke.

Segun, a particularly laid back Nigerian-born young single man in Tower of God once came to the theatre group's rehearsal wearing his jeans low on his hips, in a 'street' style that is generally not approved in the RCCG. Immediately, several people remarked angrily that his shorts underneath were showing and asked him to 'dress properly'. With a facial expression of calculated innocence mixed with an ironic smile, he replied that he had a boil which would hurt if he wore his trousers higher up. This made the whole room laugh, and even though someone suggested with a giggle that he could have worn trousers with an elastic waistband, the matter was instantly dropped. People showed their appreciation for the fact that Segun had made them laugh by not further enquiring whether the boil was real or just an excuse. It is common practice that RCCG attendants are criticised for their clothes (see Chapter Five), but Segun managed to joke his way out of a controversial situation without having to alter his clothes. It was not Segun's aim to abolish the Pentecostal norm of dressing 'moderately', but he 'played' the norm

by persuading the group into a collective effort to temporarily suspend it to have his way. Segun proved his *smartness*, because he was spontaneous, funny, judged the situation correctly, managed to deflate the tension in the room and turn the incident to his advantage.²²⁰

Rather than trying to get away with naughty behaviour like Segun, Danny's smartness is mostly geared towards advancing his business. Like many others I have spoken to, his goal for the future is to run a business that allows him to travel back and forth between Nigeria and the UK. Ultimately he aims to have residences and branches of his business in both countries. For example Tayo, who tried to preach on London busses organises business seminars in London for people who are based in Nigeria. He organises the speakers, visas, hotel, sightseeing tours etc. In this way he is not only earning money but also establishing a business network for a transnational future. Danny in particular would also like to travel to many other countries, especially the USA, to minister with his music. Apart from prayers for divine inspiration, he also relentlessly 'tries' and learns new things (e.g. computer programmes). He constantly generates ideas and is on the outlook for opportunities to promote his work and arrange collaborations. One afternoon, Danny told me that he had gone to a friend's copy shop to print out some graphic design work he had done for a client. While in the shop, he chatted to a man who turned out to be a film director. Danny remembered a film script he had written some time ago. At the time he had just felt like trying to write a film script. But now, this came in handy: the film director seemed interested in the script but also in his other work. As far as I know this encounter did not result in any collaboration, but in our conversation it was clear that Danny thought it might.²²¹ Danny is aware that many of such possibilities are fruitless. Therefore, he makes sure he comes up with many alternative plans. In spring 2009, he wanted to shoot a music video for a song he had written and recorded. Initially, he wanted it to be set in Trafalgar Square and a Southeast London Park, but had to drop the idea on short notice when he learned he had to obtain an official licence. Instead, he approached a local Secondary School, which

²²⁰ Fieldnotes, 25-04-2009.

²²¹ Informal Interview, Fieldnotes, 14-06-2009.

not only agreed to let him use the school premises, they also organised some of their students to mime a choir in the video.²²²

When I first asked Danny what his profession was, he said he trained as a graphic designer. In this capacity, he worked for a glossy magazine in Nigeria and specialises in designing calendars, fliers and business cards in the UK. With time, though, it turned out that he is also equipped and earns money as a percussionist, singer and songwriter, a journalist, photographer and camera man. Danny's strategy to diversify his skills, provide a range of services and to tap into different clients' networks may at first sight be related to the artistic nature of his work, but I suggest that this is in fact a typical way to spread risk among self-employed people in the Nigerian diaspora. This is most impressively embodied in some of the shops that are run by Nigerians in Peckham in Southeast London. They usually sell a variety of the following: dried, preserved and fresh West African foods (including leaf vegetables and West African giant snails), DVDs, music CDs, cosmetics, fabrics, clothes, shoes and hand bags, jewellery, phone cards, sunglasses, phones, Christian and other books, greeting cards and gifts, household goods, fashion magazines - just to name the most prominent ones. Many goods are imported from Lagos and other West African ports and sold on Europe-wide. To market different goods and services locally, shop owners rent out shop sections (open or divided by thin wooden or Perspex partitions) to different traders to maximise the total profit they get out of the shop rent. Hence, the items above are often sold in premises where other services are also offered: tailoring, hairdressing, barbering, nails modelling, photocopying and printing, shipping and money transfer (see Illustration 17).²²³

²²² Interview, 16-08-2009.

²²³ Often people start out trading or cooking commercially in their own flat and combine this with other several jobs and/or childcare.



Illustration 17: Multi-layered Nigerian-owned shop
on Rye Lane in Southeast London.

Rachel has worked in (petty) trade from the age of eleven when she was sent out to hawk goods in Ibadan. She built her own business in London, parallel to her work as a nurse. During my research, she moved her business from her living room to a rented section in a shop. This shop also accommodated a barber's, a hairdressing salon and a sub-shop selling and renting DVDs. The barbers' and hairdressers' chairs were rented out separately to individual stylists. One of the main female stylists also cooked Nigerian food at home, heated it up in a micro-wave that she had brought into the shop and sold it to her colleagues (and occasionally clients) in the shop. The DVD seller also offered copy-services and Rachel sold lace and print fabrics, as well as men's shirts, hand bags, man's and women's shoes, fashion and high-quality gold jewellery. On one occasion she offered children's shoes as a one-off; on another occasion she displayed jewellery that was hand-made out of beads by a friend. Often Rachel's clients were people who knew her from church or through friends who were not looking for anything in particular, but popped in for a chat or on the off-chance of finding a bargain. In addition, the people who rented the shop-sections – all, including the landlady were Nigerian-born - doubled as each other's customers. The hairdresser who was paid to plait Rachel's daughter's hair bought a handbag from Rachel a few weeks later.

As the list of business in which RCCG members are involved shows, most of them are either directly targeted at Nigerians/West Africans or are relevant to their economic and social realities in London. For my interlocutors, London's extensive Yoruba/Nigerian infrastructure provided a pool of clients and was often a means to obtain relevant information and loans to start a business or to find a shop or shop section to rent. Relying on such an ethnic environment can be a matter of survival, especially if we bear in mind that the access to bank loans and the support of the British legal system and welfare benefits are highly restricted for migrants. A certain degree of encapsulation can thus be seen as part of a wider strategy of doing business smartly, to increase reliability in business transactions by targeting 'fellow' Nigerian Pentecostals.

Learning to Be Smart

The difficult economic situation in the UK, the extensive 'ethnic' infrastructure and the familiarity with the Pentecostal prosperity message also apply to other migrant groups.²²⁴ What is specifically 'Nigerian Pentecostal' about smartness, then? So far, I have argued that it is the combination of self-discipline and flexibility with which different moral standards are applied swiftly to a situation.²²⁵ Below I describe two ways to obtain knowledge about how to be smart. On one hand, such flexibility is trained from early childhood in families and church, under the influence of a Nigerian Pentecostal regime of discipline. On the other hand, people use their specific experience of the transnational social, political and historical field of *London-Lagos* as a resource.

We have seen (especially in Chapter Seven) that RCCG members tend to emphasise strict practices of discipline to mould children into responsible and self-disciplined adult Christians in the future. Even though it is to be eradicated in the training process,

²²⁴ I am thinking here of many of the Ghanaian dominated churches or Brazilian dominated churches such as the United Church of the Kingdom of God (UCKG).

²²⁵ The report commissioned by the Institute for Public Policy Research (ippr) on the relative 'success' of the Nigerian diaspora in relation to other migrant populations perhaps reflects my suggestion that there is a specific 'Nigerian' quality to the way in which people cope with their situation (Rutter et al. 2008).

children's perceived tendency towards disobedience is seen as natural and does not seem to be judged as 'bad' per se.²²⁶

Children are expected to accompany their parents in their everyday activities and to church, and learn from them. While adults are busy with things where children cannot participate they ought not to be disturbed. During house fellowship meetings, for example, the children of hosts and visitors were usually in a separate room together to get on among themselves. While our maintenance team was cleaning the Tower of God premises on Saturdays, the team members' children usually played in some corner out of the way. If we see children from an analytical perspective as agents in their own right, such adult-free spaces encourage them to develop their own objectives and strategies to get what they want.

When they are physically together with adults, it becomes more complicated for children to pursue their own interests. At Wednesday services in Tower of God, the children join the adults in the main auditorium. Like the grown-ups, they are expected to be quiet and sit still. However, they eventually get bored and start to play with other children or walk around. At first, this is usually noticed but overlooked by the surrounding adults: they carry on praying fervently or listening intently to the preacher. When the children disturb 'too much', an usher or their parents look angrily at them, perhaps mouthing threatening words and firmly put them back on their seats. This only works for a while. They get up again, play, are put back on their chair and so on.

Though the ideal is to sit still throughout, adults seem to be sufficiently satisfied if the children do not exceed a certain level of disobedience. To prolong the periods when their play is tolerated by the adults, even toddlers are usually very good at doing things secretly, such as quietly taking biscuits out of their mother's handbag while she is praying with her eyes closed. When they laugh loud or run fast, they pause, check to see whether adults' bodily and facial expressions show negative reactions and wait if necessary until the situation has calmed down before they continue playing. The better

²²⁶ Note, though that discussions about child witchcraft accusations in Nigeria (and perhaps the UK) indicate that children – in their unruly innocence – are perceived as being easily influenced by the devil. There is ongoing anthropological research into child witchcraft accusations in the UK. Personal conversations with Jean Lafontaine in 2010.

children judge the adults around them, the more they can get away with, without provoking conflicts.

If children have been exposed doing something naughty, knowing how to get adults to laugh can be an efficient means to divert punishment – a mode we have seen in Segun's case. During one of our Saturday cleaning sessions, one male church worker asked the name of another man's three year old daughter. She was slightly confused by the question and replied 'my name is my name'. The man who had asked burst into laughter and told the others. After a second of staring at the laughing man, the girl understood that he must think her reply was funny. She laughed with him and repeated her answer. For the rest of the afternoon, the incident was turned into a joke and each time the girl yelled 'my name is my name!!' she got more excited by the men's attention and their reactions, which reflected her newly discovered ability to entertain them.²²⁷

Apart from early learned abilities to judge others' expressions and make them laugh, adults make use of their life experiences, past and present networks and their trajectories gained within London-Lagos. Their experience of having lived in Nigeria strongly informs the way they approach difficulties in London. The uncertainty, unreliability and lack of security caused and highlighted by dramatic social and economic change feature in almost all studies of Nigeria since the 1980s. These characteristics were among the strongest impressions of the country that I had during my own research (catching me somewhat unawares after having lived in Ghana and Togo) and underlie many of the interviews I have conducted both in Nigeria and London. A so-called "culture of corruption" impacts on every level of Nigerian life (Smith 2007). Power cuts, traffic jams, fraud and armed robbery are among the most prominent manifestations that people incessantly talk about. State institutions such as the police are feared for their unpredictability. The judiciary system is known for its inefficiency and is complemented by 'jungle justice'.²²⁸

To get around and make a living in such conditions, people develop strategies. In Teju Cole's novel *Every Day Is For The Thief*, a Nigerian man arrives in Lagos to visit after

²²⁷ Fieldnotes, 28-03-2009.

²²⁸ Rachel's expression to describe revenge acts carried out in Lagos by mobs or thugs, e.g. in cases of paedophilia. Interview, 30-03-2009.

several years abroad. He observes himself re-adapting to a specific mode of getting by in a corrupt environment; a 'trick' that has lain dormant while he spent time in the USA, yet seems readily accessible:

It is difficult to keep from over-doing it at first, hard to recall how I had managed all those years ago, but soon I find the right register. The trick is to present an outward attitude of alertness, while keeping a calm and observant mood within. And there also has to be this will to be violent, a will that has to be available if it is suddenly called for (2007: 35).

This tension between inner alertness and outward calmness in public and the insecurity that is caused by the omnipresent possibility that violence 'is suddenly called for' needs to be balanced. As the examples of Redemption Camp, church premises and private homes in previous chapters show, this is achieved by the tendency to build protected, self-sufficient spaces with potentially reinforced boundaries. The less accessible such spaces are to robbers, the state, etc., the safer it is. Every time my hosts in Lagos, Samuel and Toyin, came home from work or the market, they immediately threw themselves on the floor or knelt in front of an armchair for several minutes to thank God for their safe return and protection from many dangers lurking 'outside'. Most of the RCCG members I spoke to in London either grew up in Lagos or lived there for a significant period of their lives. They are familiar with the sense of danger, the 'tricks' Cole's protagonist describes, but also the buzz and challenge that young people like Danny sometimes miss.

Of course, the issues that Nigerian-born migrants face in Britain are far from the same as those they faced when they lived in Nigeria. However, Nigerians have many reasons to avoid the British state as much as the Nigerian one. In Nigeria, the crisis of governmentality (Marshall 2009: 8-9) makes life difficult. In Britain it is stigmatisation and the enforcement of immigration laws by a powerful police through raids of homes and stopp and search practices in the streets. The strategies which allow Nigerian Pentecostals to find some kinds of everyday corruption tolerable in Nigeria are similar to the ways they develop tolerance of a British state that works against them. Patron-client based networks, both in Nigeria (e.g. Smith 2007: 223) as well as in Nigerian-

dominated communities such as the RCCG parishes in London, are instrumental in securing resources. Danny had to start all over again in London, but the skills to *smartly* manage the insecurities he faced in Lagos now help him to work his way through financial and legal obstacles in Europe. For his business, he diversifies his skills and widens his network of clients as much as possible. To avoid being stopp-searched by the police he displays inconspicuous behaviour and appearance, e.g. he never wears hooded jumpers in public.

Conclusion

This chapter has shown how some of the Nigerian Pentecostals I worked with exercise agency in a challenging situation where contradictory demands of different regimes of discipline apply. Whereas in church, hierarchies and pastors' authority often influence moral behaviour enormously, in environments outside the church, the moral responsibility and agency of the individual becomes more pronounced. The chapter has explored the different shades of *smartness* that people like Danny employ to navigate the pressures of different moral systems and turn them into opportunities. As one of the biggest life challenges for Nigerian Christians in London is their material well-being, I have focussed on work and business life of RCCG members. I have demonstrated that children are trained into different registers of smartness from an early age. Experiences of life in Nigeria and their trajectories of mobility in London-Lagos are used as resources to advance one's destiny in the UK context of economic difficulty, stigmatisation and a state that is experienced as working against them.

Conclusion

In the following I summarise the line of argument that the thesis has pursued. I then re-connect the themes highlighted with the issues raised in the introduction, before offering some reflections on the wider socio-political implications of the picture that the thesis has painted. Finally I raise questions for further research.

Summary

This thesis has shown that Nigerian Pentecostal mobile selves are constituted in gendered relations of Pentecostals with close others in marriages, families, friendships, in the context of RCCG activities, as well as in the church as an institution. These social contexts are imbued with power relations that involve (self-)discipline, submission and responsibility as their main modes. The particular kind of agency that this combination generates is substantially marked by the ability to evaluate situations and one's own, as well others', behaviour and to react adequately, quickly, flexibly and in what is seen as a beneficial and morally sound way. This dynamic form of agency that I introduced as *smartness*, in the last of the substantive chapters, links back to the questions of gendered forms of personhood, the development of life strategies, as well as issues of trust and suspicion towards one's own body and desires, close others, religious authorities and society at large. RCCG members' social and moral life is supposed to follow biblical norms that are constructed as absolute. In fact, however, these doctrines are inherently ambivalent and subject to theological debates. Furthermore, in terms of actual behaviour, there is room for critical questioning of hierarchies, adaptation to new circumstances, and subtle shifts of gender norms. On the one hand, this facilitates the advancement towards a desired 'destiny' in a migration situation in London. On the

other hand, the permeability of Pentecostal moral standards also causes tension, which manifests itself in the perpetuation of mistrust against pastors and congregation members, spouses, children and state authorities.

A main focus of the thesis has been on gendered forms of RCCG members' agency in relation to their body and sexuality, marital relationships, family dynamics and the raising of children. I have examined the ways they are influenced by church practices, marital status, age and a transnational/migratory background. Undeniably, there remain stark gendered inequalities between men and women. Women's bodies are under greater scrutiny than men's; it is less acceptable for women to have premarital or extramarital sex, and the consequences for them of getting divorced are more severe than they are for men. A glorification of female endurance of suffering (including physical abuse) and frequent material dependency resulting from the ideal of being a husband's 'helpmeet' further work against women's ability to make life choices.

However, the assessment of gender as a relational category has also shown that the situation is more complex than a simplistic 'oppression' of women. Pentecostal (self-) discipline demands of everyone – man, woman and child – an active contribution in the development of their relationship with God and a committed investment into their own destinies. At the same time, both genders have to obey God and potentially surrender their whole being (in other words to actively give up one's agency). The ways in which these inherent ambivalences are negotiated not only open ways for women to insist on financially and sexually 'responsible' behaviour, but also permit them to gain agency themselves – through (rather than against) submission.

Britain's economy and the nation state also play a major role in the constitution of the migratory Nigerian Pentecostal self. Their expressed moralities and forms of discipline interact with Pentecostalism in a competitive way. Where this leads to contradictions, the research participants tended to react in two ways. Firstly, the church and family spaces – premises and homes as well as the social units of congregations and nuclear family – tended to be encapsulated to the degree that was felt necessary, especially to avoid the access of a malevolent state in relation to immigration and childcare. Secondly, in areas where detachment was not possible or desirable (e.g. in interaction

with the labour market and in missionising efforts), different ways of being smart were used to flexibly negotiate the various behavioural demands.

This kind of Pentecostal agency, geared towards managing ambivalences and ‘grey zones’, is enhanced by the RCCG members’ experiences in Nigeria. There, an economic and political ‘culture of corruption’ (Smith 2007) comes with its own deep moral ambivalences. Many of my research participants have acquired skills in Lagos to navigate such a difficult environment dominated by unreliability and insecurity. Many hold on to hopes that a Pentecostalisation of society and politics can eliminate the moral failures of a worldly system. The Pentecostal notion of a potentially global Kingdom of God allows for an understanding of a space that encompasses Nigeria as well as the UK. This makes transfers of strategic skills such as *smartness* from Nigeria to the equally ambiguous environment of London not just possible, but a smart move in itself.

RCCG members in London were aware (and often proud) of the fact that the RCCG’s GO Adeboye is a major socio-political player. However, the centrality of his person does not eliminate moral contradictions. The way in which Adeboye exercises authority, perpetuates ambivalences between participation and obedience as well as between responsibility and submission in worldly politics as much as in the church.

Theoretical Contribution

The thesis contributes to the anthropological debates that I have mapped out in the introduction in several ways. It not only offers a way of considering such different topics as gender, religion and migration together, it also allows for a contribution to each field through the *lens* of the others. The individual chapters may have focussed on one thematic field while the others have been temporarily backgrounded. But I hope that this thesis has shown that considering migration, religion and gender together can lead to a process of cross-fertilisation that is beneficial for all three areas of study.

The examination of the constitution of a Pentecostal London-Lagos subjectivity has indicated the usefulness of including gender in the analysis. I have done this in two

ways. Within a feminist framework of dismantling the invisible but implicit male norm in social sciences, I have firstly looked at gender as a factor that shapes identities and social relations among Nigerian Pentecostals in London. To do this, it was important to perceive gender as a truly relational category that is shaped by power relations involving and affecting both women and men. Secondly, I used gender as a lens. This allowed me to see religious and migration issues in a different light. I was able to draw connections between gendered and religious notions of concepts such as submission and modesty and point out the ways in which male and female accumulation of legitimate power can happen through, rather than in spite of, submission.

I have shown that a framework which emphasises research participants' experience and practices allows us to explore links between themes – such as religion, migration and gender - that are usually treated as distinct. Such connections are usually obscured by more conventional boundaries of research 'fields'. However, I found it helpful to draw on concepts of performativity and embodiment to look particularly at 'what bodies do' (e.g. how they suppress desire, are covered with clothes, learn about religion, reproduce, worship, travel) as a way to grasp such linkages.

As a result of redrawing analytical boundaries around the three research fields and focussing on bodily practices and power relations that link them, I was able to re-conceptualise common assumptions about 'religion' and 'migrants'. I showed that religion and religious practices extend far beyond church boundaries into domestic as well as public spaces. Pentecostalisised behaviour may not be recognisable to a non-Pentecostal 'outside' because it occurs within enclosed 'home' spaces, by 'radiation' or in the spiritual realm. Nevertheless, such everyday practices crucially shape Nigerian Pentecostals' self-perception as 'believers' and, in this respect, concrete interactions with other Nigerian-born Londoners, wider British society and state institutions. Nigerian Pentecostals in London draw on the transnational 'London-Lagos' space as a resource to navigate moral tensions between different moral regimes. Skills and strategies relating to encapsulation and smartness which were acquired in the experience of the Nigerian state and difficult conditions in Lagos, are adapted to manage the insecurities and disempowerment encountered in London.

To summarise, my analytical use of different thematic lenses has allowed me to see the mutual constitution of migration, religion and gender in daily life. The three thematic areas are intertwined in more complex ways than more ‘unilateral’ case studies and theories have so far assumed. My study has shown that religious practice extends far beyond the church boundaries. It has demonstrated that gender is as much about wider socio-political issues as about men and women, and has simultaneously revealed the constitution and internal dynamics of the transnational/racial/ethnic socio-moral space that I call ‘London-Lagos’.

‘Integration’ in a Pentecostal London-Lagos

My study has pointed at the particular importance of power relations and dynamics in beliefs and behaviour of Nigerian Pentecostals in London. Nigerian Pentecostals’ prioritisation of biblical morality above the laws of the land, alongside gender relations that emphasise female submission, as well as the flexibility of people, territories and boundaries in a mobile London-Lagos, are all deeply unsettling for a liberal society and state. African Pentecostals in Europe seem to emphasise continuities more than ruptures and boundaries – between the past and the present, the West and the rest, centre and margin.²²⁹ They deconstruct common categories such as ‘migrant’ in their aim to become a “producer of institutional power [by] skilfully using globalisation to create a global religious empire” (Knibbe 2009: 156) (see Illustration 18).

²²⁹ This is perhaps the paradigmatic shift in Pentecostal practice as well as social analysis that Meyer has anticipated in her article (2004b: 467-468).



Illustration 18: World map
in reception area in Jesus House in Northwest London.

Whether deliberate or a side effect, Pentecostal mobility and the associated creation of a global Kingdom of God call into question the very bases of the state – controllable borders and a single set of constitutional laws. For Pentecostal Nigerians mobility on all levels is healthy and in fact necessary. But for a nation state ‘migration’ appears as something to be closely monitored, and its desirability is assessed in economic terms of costs and benefits. Feeling threatened, the (liberal) nation state reveals its self-perception as the superior power. Politics, media and law-enforcement react with intensified efforts to monitor and control ‘immigration’ and the behaviour of its residents in discourses and practices for example around ‘child abuse’. Such state interference is concealed as a contribution to a fairer society under the discursive framework of freedom, equality and tolerance, but represented by Nigerian Pentecostal practices as border disputes, as xenophobic and racist, no different from practices of totalitarian states. A Pentecostal perspective shows how “large-scale social forces come to be translated into personal distress and disease” (Farmer 2004:281). This study points at the importance of dismantling the impact of such structural power dynamics rather

than hiding behind a paradigm of cultural ‘otherness’ of Pentecostals and their practices (see *ibid.*: 287).

For Pentecostal Nigerians, Britain may at times be a platform where the rescue of the whole globe is performed, rather than a land in which they arrive, settle and become emotionally attached, leaving another place ‘behind’. Multiculturalism is regularly declared dead by high ranking politicians. But it is the nation-state’s categories of ‘migrants’ versus ‘host’ society that are failing to reflect people’s experience. Mobile people claim political and social agency in accordance with their own moral standards. It is the assumptions on which popular concepts of multiculturalism or integration are based that are faulty – not the social realities they seek to describe.

The Ghanaian Methodists Fumanti worked with “are becoming increasingly aware of the critique of encapsulation. But from their point of view ethnic fellowships do not imply exclusion or exclusiveness: they are the *loci* where people’s agency is experienced, and where people gain recognition, distinction and visibility, often in contrast with their lives outside the church” (Fumanti 2010: 27, my emphasis). Recognition is a “vital human need” (Taylor 1994: 26), which they find in church rather than wider society. The judging, suspicious ‘outside’ gaze (embodied in the English woman in the pub from the very beginning of this thesis, who was not sure what was happening in the church down her road, but was nevertheless convinced it could not be ‘right’) perpetuates itself and possibly produces much of the encapsulation in the first place.

My study reveals a Nigerian Pentecostal perspective that identifies finger-pointing UK society as neglecting its civic duties. In an interview, Tayo is startled that ‘Britons’ (as he identifies them) do not take more responsibility for what society looks like, but rather prefer to complain.

[W]hen I got used to London, I was a bit disappointed about the (...) attitude of people, that they were such bad dressers in London, they don’t dress well you know they don’t dress well. (...) People get on the bus, they sneeze openly, they cough openly, they don’t close... nothing to show hygiene, they throw paper anywhere, they eat on the street, they stand at the bus stop and eating chicken

and chips and putting things through their mouth at the bus stop. Those things are not right, they ... I've got used to it – that is the London way. (...) I know that amongst the ... err ... the rich, those who are bit affluent, those tend to take the tradition of British culture with them a bit; they start to protect and preserve it. (...) They might be disappointed about how much dilution has come into their culture, but they seem helpless about it, they can't do anything because there is no... they might think it is because there are too many strangers. Immigrants come from all over the world, they have diluted their culture, they turned London upside down; but I think they are ones not sane enough to preserve their culture and preserve the standards. London is very dirty, it's a very dirty city. When you go out it's dirt all over the place, it's a dirty environment. So we do have many challenges. The weather has been helpful. If they had the tropical weather here, it would be horrible, they won't be able to manage it.²³⁰

Apart from their 'encapsulating' and 'tricksterish', 'smart' modes of acting, many Pentecostals felt a strong sense of obligation to contribute to British society, as citizens and ambassadors of the 'Kingdom of God' – whether they were British citizens, legitimate or indeed illegalised residents. This attitude is nurtured not least by the Pentecostal notion of agency, with its valorisation of self-reliance as well as taking responsibility for others. Such a notion overlaps strongly with liberal notions of citizenship. It is crucial for the future of African migrants in Europe that the host society should come to understand how a 'double engagement' does not contradict 'integration' in itself (see Grillo and Mazzucato 2008: 193). Glick Schiller et al. (2006) point out that there are manifold "pathways of incorporation". But such *pathways* are crucially shaped by interactions with the 'receiving' context and the way migrants are viewed. Perhaps European societies and politics should take more 'responsibility' in the Pentecostal sense of a committed *doing* to change social 'destiny' rather than blaming immigrants or certain religious groups for socio-economic or moral deterioration. Especially in a city such as London, dialogue and exchange to build communities occurs 'on the ground'. Such negotiations of morality and practicalities may happen off the radar of political institutions and in ways that are not necessarily perceived as 'integration'. But the rejection of a 'blame culture', taking all residents seriously (no matter their 'background') and a common aim to make society a 'better' one could be the basis of negotiating what this may exactly mean in everyday interaction.

²³⁰ Interview with Tayo and his wife Iris, 25-07-2009.

Further Research

In an interview, one RCCG pastor pointed out that his RCCG parish is currently looking into buying larger premises – implying that the congregation consists at least partly of relatively wealthy individuals. According to him, when they started out, they were nothing more than “a bunch of immigrants”.²³¹ The transformations the pastor describes for his congregation, prompt directions for further research into the RCCG: For instance, what changes will occur in practice and demography as members become more and more established? Will their expansion in the UK slow down? Will the children of today’s members stay in the RCCG, attend other churches or not go to church at all? Will their quest for official recognition change? Jesus House in Northwest London, the biggest RCCG parish in the UK, has started to engage intensely in social and civic matters in its local environment. This earned them the honour of a visit by Prince Charles in November 2007. However, they are also looking into building bigger premises and – depending on land prices – are prepared to move out of the area.

Furthermore, the Pastor’s comment, above, about his congregation formerly having been a poor ‘bunch’ indicates that factors such as class may stratify the RCCG internally to a larger extent than my study was able to grasp. Though they took their efforts to live in a holy way just as seriously as others, Jesus House staff and members always struck me as particularly ‘liberal’ and perhaps less hierarchical than those in other parishes. When I asked, they usually stated that it was Pastor Agu’s personality and leadership that had attracted them to the church. More conservative pastors were thought to gather more conservative (and perhaps older or more recently arrived) congregations around them. However, they also mentioned that their ‘liberal values’ stemmed from the upper class background (both in terms of education and wealth) of their families in Lagos, as well as sometimes their coming to Britain at an early age. In a knock-on effect, their better access to education and higher mobility made possible a higher social status, better jobs and intermingling with ‘higher class’ Europeans in the UK.

²³¹ Interview, 06-11-2008.

Class, age and generation may not just have an impact on internal differences in the RCCG. They may also have a critical influence on individual subjectivities – in a similar manner to what I have shown for gender. Botticello's doctoral thesis (2009a, especially chapter 4) makes it very clear that second generation Nigerians often have very different outlooks on British society, parenting practices and their Nigerian background than their parents. It would be interesting not only to deepen the analysis and examine how Nigerian Pentecostal subjectivities are internally further stratified, but also to look at how they compare and interact with Muslim Yoruba subjectivities in London.

And lastly, it is important to widen the analysis of mobile subjectivities to other 'migrant' groups and institutions than churches to assess to what extent transnational social and moral fields such as London-Lagos can be found in other religious, ethnic or national contexts and what constitutes them in those other cases. With regard to relationships with European society, it would be interesting to ask to what extent the modes of encapsulation and smartness are shaped by the specific experiences of Nigerian social conditions, and to what extent they appear to be employed in other 'ethnic/national' migration settings as responses to the European nation state (rather than ethnic background). To assess such matters, not only are comparisons between 'Nigerian' and 'other' migrants necessary, but also needed is a much deeper analysis of postcolonial and racist elements in the current construction of fortress Europe and its individual countries.

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Appendix

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